

THE
CHRISTIAN LESSON
COMMENTARY
1911



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THE CHRISTIAN LESSON COMMENTARY

FOR THE USE OF TEACHERS AND AD-
VANCED STUDENTS. NOTES ON THE IN-
TERNATIONAL BIBLE STUDIES FOR 1911

AUTHORS:

W. C. MORRO

Dean of the College of the Bible, Lexington, Ky.

I. J. SPENCER

Minister Central Christian Church, Lexington, Ky.

MRS. I. J. SPENCER

EDITOR:

W. W. DOWLING

COTNER COLLEGE

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CHRISTIAN PUBLISHING COMPANY
ST. LOUIS

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CHRISTIAN PUBLISHING CO.,
St. Louis, Mo.

J. J. SPENCER

Missouri Central Christian Church, Lexington, Ky.

MRS. J. J. SPENCER

EDITOR

W. W. DOWLING

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PREFATORY.

THE CHRISTIAN LESSON COMMENTARY, for the twenty-sixth consecutive year, comes with its offer of aid to Ministers, Bible Teachers and Advanced Students of the Uniform International Bible Studies for the year 1911. For the sake of variety and completeness, three authors have been co-laborers in the preparation of the material: W. C. Morro, Dean of the College of the Bible, Lexington, Kentucky, has written the Geographical, Expository and Explanatory Notes; I. J. Spencer, minister of the Central Christian Church, Lexington, Ky., has supplied a series of Lesson Questions and New Testament Teachings, while Mrs. I. J. Spencer has contributed a Lesson Story.

The authors are equipped for their task by ripe scholarship and a rich and varied experience, and have earnestly and faithfully striven to give the great army of teachers and students in our Bible School ranks the very best helps attainable in their study and teaching of the Word of God. That they have admirably succeeded will be apparent to all who give this volume a careful examination.

St. Louis, November, 1910.

THE PUBLISHERS.

WORDS BEFOREHAND.

The International Bible Studies for the year 1911 take us into Old Testament history, dealing with the division of the kingdom of Solomon in the days of his immediate successor, the captivity of the Ten Tribes, or Northern kingdom, and, later, the captivity of the Judah, or the Southern kingdom, and the return of a portion of the captives and the rebuilding of the Temple and the walls of Jerusalem.

The Books of the Bible from which the lessons are chiefly drawn in the strictly historical section are First and Second Kings, First and Second Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Esther, and in those usually classified as Prophetical—Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Jonah, Micah and Malachi.

The studies from Kings and Chronicles give us condensed accounts of the condition of affairs in the two kingdoms from the time of the Division to the final Captivity, dwelling particularly on the great sins that resulted in their overthrow. The prophecies of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Jonah and Micah, which have in them also much history, belong to this Historical Period, and are largely warnings of impending destruction, uttered in attempts to turn the people and their rulers from their evil ways, with occasional pictures of the happy condition that would prevail under the reign of the Messiah, which should be ushered in in due time.

The lessons from Esther and from the prophets, Ezekiel and Daniel, gives us brief accounts and vivid pictures of life among the captives in the lands of the captivity. Ezra and Nehemiah treat largely of the return of the exiles, the rebuilding of the Temple and the reorganization of the worship, while Malachi tells briefly of the condition of the people after the return, with warnings and promises, and closes the period of Old Testament history.

The lessons of the year enforce in a most striking way, and are commentaries on the declaration of Holy Writ, that "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people" (Prov. 14:34), and "The wicked walk on every side when vileness is exalted among the sons of men" (Psa. 12:8).

W. W. DOWLING.

LESSONS FOR THE YEAR.

FIRST QUARTER.

1. The Kingdom Divided	1	8. Elijah's Flight and Return.....	69
2. Jeroboam Makes Idols	11	9. Elijah's Meeting with Ahab at Na-	
3. Asa's Good Reign	21	both's Vineyard	80
4. Omri and Ahab Sin	31	10. Elijah's Ascension	90
5. Jehoshaphat's Good Reign.....	42	11. Elisha Restores a Life	100
6. Elijah the Prophet	50	12. Defeat Through Drunkenness.....	110
7. Elijah's Victory over Baal.....	59	13. Quarterly Review	117

SECOND QUARTER.

1. Elisha Heals Naaman	131	7. Isaiah's Vision and Call	197
2. Elisha's Defenders	143	8. Song of the Vineyard	207
3. Joash Crowned King	151	9. Micah's Picture of Peace.....	216
Easter Lesson	161	10. Israel's Penitence	224
4. Joash Repairs the Temple.....	169	11. Hezekiah's Great Passover.....	232
5. God's Pity for the Heathen.....	178	12. Downfall of Samaria	242
6. Uzziah, the King of Judah, Humbled.	188	13. Quarterly Review	251

THIRD QUARTER.

1. Isaiah's Prophecy Concerning Sennac-		7. Jehoiakim Burns the Prophet's Roll.	321
herib	267	8. Jeremiah Cast into Prison.....	329
2. The Suffering Servant	277	9. Judah Carried Captive	338
3. Manasseh's Wickedness and Penitence.	287	10. Review Lesson	347
4. Josiah's Devotion	296	11. Daniel and His Companions.....	354
5. Finding of the Book of the Law.....	304	12. Daniel's Companions in the Fiery	
6. Jeremiah Tried and Acquitted.....	313	Furnace	362
		13. Daniel in the Lions' Den	371

FOURTH QUARTER.

1. The Prophet Ezekiel	385	7. Belshazzar's Feast and Fate	439
2. The Life-Giving Stream	394	8. Ezra's Journey to Jerusalem	447
3. Return from Captivity	403	9. Nehemiah's Prayer	455
4. Foundation of the Second Temple....	412	10. Rebuilding the Walls	464
5. A Psalm of Deliverance	421	11. Nehemiah and His Enemies	473
6. Esther Pleading for Her People.....	430	12. Ezra Teaches the Law	482
		13. Judah Rebuked and Encouraged.....	492

CLASS RECORD

Class No.....

Teacher

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ORDER OF SERVICES.

It is in every way fitting that the honor of leading the Bible schools of our Christian Churches for the year 1911 should fall to the **FIRST FRONT RANK CHRISTIAN BIBLE SCHOOL IN THE WORLD**. Superintendent Charles L. Mason, of the South Broadway Christian Bible school, Denver, Colorado, offers the following program for Sunday services. Following the program are some notes and suggestions for superintendents and teachers: "

1. Silence.
2. Prelude—all stand.
3. Song: "Come, Thou Almighty King."
4. Invocation by Superintendent, School joining in Lord's prayer at close. All seated.
5. Announcements.
6. Beginner's and Primary Recessional by Orchestra or organ.
7. Memory Reading by School. (Ps. 1, 19, 23, 100, the Beatitudes, or 1 Cor. 13.)
8. Song, selected.
9. Preview of Lesson and Prayer.
10. Song, selected.
11. Class Processional, by Orchestra or organ.
12. Study Period.
13. Class Recessional, by Orchestra or organ.
14. Song: "Onward, Christian Soldiers."
15. Supplemental Bible Drill.
16. Reports.
17. Closing Song: "Till We Meet Again."
18. Mizpah or Aaronic Benediction. Gen. 31:49, or Num. 6:24-26.
19. Postlude.

Note 1, item 5. Make the announcements as few and as brief as possible. Ask the teachers privately to make especially important announcements in the class and do not make them to the school as a whole.

Note 2, item 7. Announce beforehand the Psalm or reading to be used on any Sunday. Let those who have committed it stand during the reading, while those seated may join in the reading from their Bibles.

Note 3, item 9. The preview should be wholly suggestive, designed to rouse expectant interest in the pupils for the lesson to follow. Never rob the teachers of the opportunity to present the lesson fresh and original.

Note 4, item 18. The Aaronic Benediction is preferable. It is one of the most beautiful of all benedictions. The Mizpah Benediction is almost invariably misquoted, and its first use by Jacob and Laban was the direct opposite of a blessing.

Note 5. Make the idea of the whole service reverent, devout and earnest. It is a mistake to suppose that young people are attracted and held chiefly by noisy music and splashy enthusiasm. The spirit of worship is natural to childhood.



1911—FIRST QUARTER.—1911

Lesson 1.

January 1.

THE KINGDOM DIVIDED.

1 Kings 12:1-24. (To be printed, 12-20.)

GOLDEN TEXT—He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed. Prov. 13:20.

Memory Verses—13, 14. **Suggested Readings**—1 Kings 11:1-43. **Time**—982 B. C. **Persons**—Rehoboam, Jeroboam, all Israel, David, Solomon, Ahijah, Old Men, Young Men. **Place**—Shechem.

DAILY READINGS.

Dec. 26... M—1 Kings 12:1-24—The Kingdom Divided.
Dec. 27... T—1 Sam. 8:10-22—The "Manner of the King" Predicted.
Dec. 28... W—1 Kings 10:1-29—The "Manner of The King" Verified.
Dec. 29... T—1 Kings 11:26-40—The Prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite.
Dec. 30... F—Prov. 4:1-19—Avoiding Evil Counsel.
Dec. 31... S—Prov. 15:20-33—The Wise Harkeneth to Reproof.
Jan. 1.... S—Ps. 1:1-16—Walking Not in the Counsel of the Wicked.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Shechem. The city of Shechem was located near the dividing line of Ephraim and Western Manasseh. It was almost in the center of the land of Israel from north to south and also from east to west. It was about thirty-five miles north of Jerusalem, and was situated in the valley between Mt. Ebal on the north and Mt. Gerizim on the south. Near the city, in the valley between the two mountains, is a very remarkable natural amphitheater.

The central location, together with this convenient amphitheater, possibly led to its selection as the place for this important meeting. It seems strange, however, that Rehoboam should have left Jerusalem, which David had selected

as the capital city, and where Solomon had been anointed, to be coronated at Shechem. There were ancient and sacred associations connected with Shechem, however, which doubtless contributed materially to its importance. Here Abram had camped and Jacob had sojourned; and here the bones of Joseph were buried; near here, also, Jacob's well was located. The modern name of the city is Nablus. Its population is about 20,000, and it is one of the most flourishing cities in modern Palestine. It was not at all suitable as a military stronghold, for the overtopping peak of Gerizim gave complete control of the city. Doubtless this was the reason why Jeroboam so soon removed his capital from this place to Tirzah.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

The brilliant reign of Solomon had come to an end. He had made silver to be as stones in Jerusalem. The highly valued cedar wood had been made as the common sycamore in abundance. He had brought horses out of Egypt in droves, and had chariots and horses in various cities. He had married 700 wives, and he had 300 concubines. His annual revenue was 666 talents of gold. His ivory throne was ornamented with gold. His 200 shields and 600 bucklers were of gold. His drinking vessels and all the other vessels of his palace were of pure gold.

All this splendor could not be maintained but by laying heavy burdens on his people. So long as the great king lived he dazzled the people into silence, though they groaned in private under the heavy burdens which were weighing them down. Now that the king was dead

a cry for relief burst from the lips of the people when they assembled to crown a new king.

It is by no means improbable that influences had been at work even before the death of Solomon, looking to a change. The prophecy of Ahijah, the flight of Jeroboam into Egypt, Solomon's attempt to kill Jeroboam, and the latter's prompt return in response to information sent him of the death of the king, are indications of impending efforts to secure relief.

At the beginning of his reign Solomon's dominion extended over Edom, Moab, Ammon, Syria and Philistia. Egypt and Phœnicia were allies. Assyria had not yet arisen from obscurity. During the course of his reign rebellion weakened somewhat his hold on certain of his provinces (1 Kings 11:14-25) and a change in dynasties deprived him of Egypt's favor.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 1. Rehoboam: The only son of Solomon mentioned in the Bible, though he had numerous wives (1 Kings 11:3). Rehoboam was not of pure Israelitish stock, for his mother was an Ammonitess (1 Kings 14:21). **All Israel:** Israel proper, the ten northern tribes. **To make him king:** To crown him and to give silent assent at least to his assuming the throne. The principle that the oldest son of the dead king should assume the vacant place was not yet securely established as a part of the nation's law. Only part of Saul's subjects accepted his son as his successor. David's establishment of Solomon on the throne before the former's death was the only thing that saved the nation from the horror of a contest for the throne. From this time till the country passes under the suzerainty of Babylon the law of primogeniture prevails. This assembly at Shechem

was probably a concession to the popular feeling that they should have a voice in the selection of their ruler.

2. This verse and part of verse 3 are omitted from the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament. According to this account Jeroboam had no part in the revolt at Shechem, but was chosen later (verse 20). According to the Hebrew version, from which our English translation is made, Jeroboam heard of Solomon's death and returned in time to be present at the assembly in Shechem. The tidings that Solomon was dead was what he heard in Egypt and not of the proposed assembly.

4. **Yoke:** This consisted in the forced labor which Solomon had exacted to carry on his public work (1 Kings 5:13-17) and in the tribute collected from the provinces to pay the expenses of his household (1 Kings 4:7-19, 22-23).

6 And king Rehoboam took counsel with the old men, that had stood before Solomon his father while he yet lived, saying, What counsel give ye me to return answer to this people? 7 And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever. 8 But he forsook the counsel of the old men which they had given him, and took counsel with the young men that were grown up with him, that stood before him. 9 And he said unto them, What counsel give ye, that we may return answer to this people, who have spoken to me, saying, Make the yoke that thy father did put upon us lighter? 10 And the young men that were grown up with him spake unto him, saying, Thus shalt

thou say unto this people that spake unto thee, saying, Thy father made our yoke heavy, but make thou it lighter unto us; thus shalt thou speak unto them, My little finger is thicker than my father's loins. 11 And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions.

12 So Jeroboam and all the people came to Rehoboam the third day, as the king bade, saying, Come to me again the third day. 13 And the king answered the people roughly, and forsook the counsel of the old men which they had given him, 14 and spake to them after the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, but I will add to your yoke: my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with

6. Took counsel: Ancient kings had attached to their courts men whose sagacity and readiness to give advice had been thoroughly proven. Any subject on which the king required advice was debated pro and con in the presence of the king, who acted as a sort of moderator and arbiter over the discussion. cf. 2 Samuel 15:31-34, 16:20-28. Old men: Not elderly persons, but elders, official advisers. Stood before: A fixed expression to describe the service of one who attended an ancient king in an official capacity. Cf. Deut. 10:8, 19:25, 1 Kings 1:2, 10:8, Prov. 22:29, Dan. 1:5, Luke 21:36.

7. A servant: The prevailing conception of the relation of a king to his subjects was the very reverse of this. Cf. Matt. 20:25. This day: Limits the period Rehoboam was to be servant to the people. Their advice was, therefore, not an anticipation of the Christian principle, but at most was a mere makeshift to soothe the anger of the populace.

8. Young men: These youths were

about the same age as Rehoboam who, according to 14:21, was then forty-one. A man of these years is old enough to resist the impulses of youth and to act more discreetly.

10. My little finger, etc.: This means, "I shall exact service from you much greater than my father did, as much greater as you would expect if my little finger were larger than my father's body."

11. Scorpions: Two explanations have been offered. The first is, that the scorpion was a whip made of spiny thorn, and an Arab writer is quoted to the effect that the spines resemble the stings of the scorpion. The other is, that it was a "whip having leaden balls at the end of the lashes with hooks projecting from them." St. Isadore, a Christian writer of the sixth century, so describes it.

12. Third day: According to the Jewish methods of counting time, "for three days" (vs. 5) means the same as on the "third day." Cf. Luke 9:22, 18:33, 27:64, Matt. 27:63, Mark 8:31.

scorpions. 15 So the king hearkened not unto the people; for it was a thing brought about of Jehovah, that he might establish his word, which Jehovah spake by Ahijah the Shilonite to Jeroboam the son of Nebat.

16 And when all Israel saw that the

king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents.

(American Standard Revised Version. Copyright, 1901, by Thomas Nelson & Sons.)

15. Of Jehovah: The partition of the kingdom was according to God's purpose, though the acts by which it was brought about were not pleasing to him. Ahijah: A prophet. Cf. 1 Kings 11:29. Shilonite: An inhabitant of Shiloh. This is the first reference to this city since the days of Eli (1 Sam. 4:12), when it was probably destroyed by the Philistines (Ps. 78: 60, Jer. 7:12, 26:6).

16. What portion, etc.: Neither interest nor part in the government. David... son of Jesse: Hebrew parallelism. To your tents: 2 Samuel 20:1. A proverbial expression that had its origin in the days when Israel dwelt in tents. See to thine own house: A hint that they will tolerate no interference, and a warning to the house of David to content itself with the rule of its own tribe.

COMMENTS.

The Background. The background of this lesson must be thoroughly appreciated in order to understand the motives, the passions, and the actions of the king and the people. Back of this gathering at Shechem lie eighty years of national prosperity (1 Kings 2:11-11:42). Two kings reigned during that long period. David's reign was characterized by external growth of the nation. He extended the boundaries of his kingdom until he ruled over all the country from the desert on the south to the river Euphrates on the north. It was a period of successful wars, increasing wealth, and national glory. Solomon's reign was a period of internal development. He carried on no wars. It seems that he even lost some territory (1 Kings 11:14-23). But he developed commerce (1 Kings 4), and carried on great building enterprises. In spite of all these elements of strength and prosperity, however, his death revealed two decided weaknesses that had hitherto remained concealed. The first was a country impoverished and exhausted at the expense of a wealthy capital. Solo-

mon made silver and gold to be abundant in Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:27); he lavished upon it temples and palaces; and here were massed his wealth and splendor, yet the provinces were neglected or even drained to provide for this magnificence. Other cities became jealous of Jerusalem. Some of them, like Shechem, were older, and possessed altars for the worship of Jehovah before David had located the one altar at Jerusalem.

The second weakness was the discontent which resulted from the over-enrichment of the capital at the expense of the provinces. The successful rebellion against the authority of Solomon in distant provinces and the intrigues of Jeroboam described in chapter 11 show the presence of this discontent, but no permanent and successful method of correcting the grievances of the people was possible during the life-time of Solomon. His death and the subsequent coming to the throne of another king afforded the opportunity. The coronation of a new king in oriental lands has ever been the occasion of grievances and rebellion. In

some cases these complaints have been made by diplomacy, in others by arms. Rehoboam possessed neither diplomacy nor force.

The Coronation at Shechem. The discontent discussed above existed especially in the breasts of the northern tribesmen. The advisers of Rehoboam

as yet unknown, led them to the crystallization of their grievances in specific demands. No doubt such a result would have taken place wherever the gathering to crown the king had been held, but it is probable that the very fact that it was held in one of the cities of the malcontents aided the uprising.



MODERN NABLUS—ANCIENT SHECHEM.

evidently sought to allay this somewhat by planning his coronation in the city of Shechem. As David had been crowned in Hebron, the ancient shrine of Judah (2 Samuel 2:1-4), so now Rehoboam is taken to the ancient shrine of the northern tribes. (See Introduction.) This was not sufficient concession to them, however, for the gathering of the tribes and the opportunity for conference together revealed to each man that his own feelings were shared by others. This and the fact that a new king was coming to the throne whose power and policy were

The Request for Time (v. 5). Rehoboam's first move is an ill-advised one. He asked for three days in which to consider the answer which he was to give. Instead of this indicating prudence on the part of the young king it really was a sign of weakness and foreboded a vacillating policy. If he had regarded as of chief importance the welfare and interest of his subjects and had been well informed upon the condition of the nation he would have recognized their demand as a reasonable one and would have acceded to it at once, in principle at least.

He might have then asked for time in which to devise ways of carrying out the new policy, but the people would have parted from him in a pleasant and hopeful frame of mind. As it was, they went from him in suspense, and the three days were spent in discussion and agitation, with the result that when the time was up the people were in an uglier frame of mind, and nothing but very substantial concession could have appeased them.

Lack of Unity in the Higher Circles

(vs. 6-11.) The discussion in the presence of the king showed that there was an unfortunate lack of unity in the higher circles. In the conflict of opinion one fact stands out clearly: There is an almost complete lack of consideration for the people. Even the advice of the venerable counsellors is little better than a subterfuge that the king may again be master of his subjects. The young courtiers are utterly ignorant or heedless of the feeling among the people; the old men advise him to humor them; and the king is irresolute. All are selfish, and there is an utter absence of a policy which will preserve the liberties and develop the capabilities of the people. The germ of all this is found in the policy of Solomon who turned from God and the interests of the people to minister to his own selfishness.

The Two Policies (vs. 6-11). One or the other or both of the two policies proposed to Rehoboam are to be found in most countries where the people harbor grievances against the government. One is repression, the meeting of complaints by yet severer measures. This course has reached its acme in the present policy of Russia. The other seeks to placate by temporary expedients. Notable examples of this were the policy of Roman emperors in giving largess of grain and exhibiting gladiatorial shows to the Roman people. In contrast to both of these is that policy which President Lincoln so aptly described as "a government of the people, for the people and by

the people." Such a conception of government was absent altogether from the council of Rehoboam.

The King and His People (vs. 12-15).

The answer made by the king to the people was based upon ignorance or complete disregard of the actual condition of the kingdom. It was pure braggadocio without either knowledge or power to support it. The consequence upon a people whose temper is already in an ugly mood is not surprising. Nor did Rehoboam have the natural wisdom to correct this false move. He saw that he must negotiate, but instead of treating in his own person, which would have been the wise course for him, he sent as his representative Adoram, or Adoniram, who had been Solomon's superintendent of forced labor (5:14). The king, no doubt, felt that Adoram was accustomed to compel the people to do his bidding and so **was the best man for this emergency**. But for that very reason he was not the man for that hour. He embodied in his own person, his acts and his bearing toward them, all of their grievances. He was slain by the exasperated populace. Rehoboam next proposed force, but the prophet of God checked him in this. It was not part of God's plan for this portion of his chosen people to be enslaved to a selfish tyrant. By every circumstance Rehoboam stands convicted of the absence of those qualities by which a king can hope to govern well. He is an utter misfit.

Opposition to David's House (v. 16).

In the language of the people there is revealed one of the human reasons for this partition of the kingdom. It was smoldering opposition to David's family. This was open and avowed during the first years of David's reign. It was seven years after Judah had chosen David before the Ten Tribes accepted him as their ruler, and these had been years of wise leadership and skillful diplomacy on David's part. This opposition is shown again by the readiness with which Sheba

gained followers (2 Sam. 20:1), and it is quite probable that it was this opposition which made the rebellion of Absalom a possibility. The strong reigns of David and Solomon had kept this opposition under suppression, but with the first false move on the part of Rehoboam it breaks forth anew, and its breaking out was like a volcano, the more violent because of the restraint that has been placed upon it. The opponents of David's line showed the venom of their hate by exclaiming, "Now see to thine own house, David." In this speech "we perceive a more potent cause for the partition of the kingdom than the alleged oppression of Solomon." (Keil).

A Thing Brought About by Jehovah (vs. 15.). We may study this partition of the kingdom from two points of view, the human and the divine. We may account for it by human causes, but these are not all-sufficient. The disruption did not take place without God. Nor, on the other hand, does the introduction of God as the chief cause eliminate the human part. These two explanations are not antagonistic or mutually exclusive. When we study this partition of the kingdom we find that there are very tangible human reasons for it, and these human causes are not one, but many. They were in part the oppression of Solomon, the thoughtlessness of Rehoboam, the deep-seated antagonism between Judah and Joseph, and the general course of the monarchy—each had a part in producing the rebellion, yet these apparent reasons must not blind our eyes to that other

reason: "It was a thing brought about of Jehovah." In many other incidents in the Bible these two facts of divine sovereignty and human agency stand contrasted. In all of these it is the supreme task of the sacred writer to keep before his readers the truth that God is in his world and human events are not without his direction. He unfolds to us the human causes, but, without eliminating these human causes, or, shall we not rather say, through the instrumentality of these human causes, God works out his purpose among the nations. The sacred writer seldom pauses to show how these two facts may be adjusted, and in many cases he could give no more rational explanation than the one suggested above. His interest was not in the how or the why, but in the fact that in God we live, move and have our being.

God Was Not in All Their Thoughts. God's providence in bringing this about does not make the action of the human agents righteous. That assembly at Shechem was conspicuous for a complete lack of religious feeling. It is one of the first assemblies in Israel's history described in the Scriptures that does not relate itself in some way to God's right to the homage of the nation. Cf. Josh. 24:1, 1 Sam. 10:19, 2 Sam. 5:3, 1 Kings 8:1-62. But in this gathering God's name is not on the lips of either king or counsellors. The Divine presence is ignored by all, nor were any steps taken to worship him or invoke his approval upon what was being done. This will create no surprise when it is observed that the prevailing motive on the part of all is utter selfishness.

THE LESSON STORY.

Rehoboam, the son of King Solomon and Naamah, the heathen Ammonitess, succeeded in Jerusalem without opposition in the year B. C. 937. The northern tribes, however, did not so willingly accept him as their king. They were bent upon first securing from him some assur-

ance of relief from their heavy burdens. Instead of going to him in Jerusalem they assembled at ancient Shechem to lay before him their grievances and request. They had in their midst a champion in Jeroboam, the son of Nebat of Ephraim. He had been promoted by Solomon, dur-

ing the building of the fortifications in Jerusalem, to the position of overseer for the proud and powerful tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, which tribes practically represented all Israel except Judah, Benjamin and almost nominal Simeon.

One day as he was leaving Jerusalem, possibly to visit his widowed mother, he was met by the prophet Ahijah, who, drawing him aside into a field, took from his own shoulders a new outer garment and tore it into twelve pieces and gave to him ten of the number, telling him that thus the kingdom should be rent and that he should rule over ten tribes, leaving Judah, only, to Solomon's son. Fired with ambition by the prophet's words, he sought the immediate overthrow of Solomon, but, failing in this, fled into Egypt and remained there until the death of the king. So, now, at the call of Israel, he is come to Shechem to meet the young heir to the throne.

Here the assembly complained bitterly before Rehoboam of the grievous yoke which his father had put upon them, but they promised that if he would lighten it they would be his servants. He foolishly delayed his answer until the third day. He first sought advice of the old men, his father's former counsellors, who told him that if he would make the people his willing subjects he must show himself willing to be their servant. It is no wonder that a haughty, ignorant tyrant should have scorned the advice. He next turned to consult his young men, men of his own type, who said he should inform the men of Israel that he would make their burdens heavier and their chastise-

ments sorer than his father had made them. "They were struck by his words as by an iron rod." Upon hearing them they rebelled against the "house of David."

So fierce was their anger that when Adoram, a servant of the new king, was sent down to quiet the people they stoned him to death and the young king himself had to flee to Jerusalem for safety.

Then Israel made Jeroboam their king. The house of David sought to subdue the rebels and to restore them to Judah, but in vain. A great army, one hundred and eighty thousand chosen men of Judah and Benjamin, was ordered to fight against Israel, but the movement was arrested by the prophet Shemaiah, who declared that the division of the kingdom was "of the Lord" and forbade the intended warfare against their brethren.

Thus was revealed the divine purpose for the ten tribes to remain distinct and for Solomon's son to rule over Judah only, and this for David's sake, that his lamp might not be extinguished.

In spite of the sins of Solomon and the strife that followed; in spite of the national disruption and its consequent troubles, through all the intervening centuries until the birth of Jesus the lamp of promise continued in the house of David:

"And thou, Bethlehem, land of Judah,
Art in no wise least among the princes of
Judah;
For out of thee shall come forth a governor,
Who shall be shepherd of my people Israel."
Micah 5:2; Matt. 2:6.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. Who were the three preceding kings of Israel?

2. Why was the kingdom divided? 1 Kings 11:11.

3. Why was it not divided in Solomon's day? 1 Kings 11:12.

4. What prophet told Jeroboam he

should be king and how did he tell it? 1 Kings 11:29-31.

5. Why was Judah saved to Solomon's son Rehoboam? 1 Kings 11:36.

6. Name two especially disastrous sins of Solomon. 1 Kings 11:1, 4, 5-8.

7. Why had Jeroboam gone into Egypt? 1 Kings 11:40.

HELPFUL QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. What persons assembled at Shechem and for what purpose? 1 Kings 12:1-3.

2. What reasonable request was made by the assembly? 1 Kings 12:3-4.

3. What immediate answer did Rehoboam give to them and their request? 1 Kings 12:5.

4. With whom did he first take counsel? And what did they answer? 1 Kings 12:6, 7.

5. With whom did he then take counsel? And what did they answer? 1 Kings 12:8-11.

6. Which advice pleased the king, and which did he adopt? 1 Kings 12:12-15.

7. Back of this discontent, of the request and reply, who was directing the revolution? 1 Kings 12:15.

8. Why were Judah and Benjamin not allowed to fight against Israel? 1 Kings 12:23, 24.

9. What decided answer did Israel make to Rehoboam and the counsel of the young men? 1 Kings 12:16.

10. How did Israel show further resentment to Rehoboam? 1 Kings 12:18.

11. In lieu of the king of Judah, whom did Israel choose to rule over them? 1 Kings 12:20.

12. What prophet changed the purpose of Rehoboam and how? 1 Kings 12:21-24.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. Important to guard against the seeds of national decay—selfishness, vanity, extravagance, impurity, worldliness, love of power.

2. God weaves his purposes through and despite the wrath and folly of men.

3. God himself is the only true principle of union in the state or in the church.

4. He who came not to be ministered unto, but to minister and give his life for his people, is the true King of kings and Lord of lords.

5. The lamp for which Judah was preserved was He who said, "I am the light of the world."

6. He who would rule men must know and love them.

The fathers of the American revolution made God their King, seeking to do his will, as Jeroboam was told to do in order that God might be with him and build him a sure house.

It is better that the church should be divided than that it should be united according to a principle of selfishness, love of the world or love of domination. There

is not always strength in union. It depends upon the principle of the union. A union of all the denominations into a corrupt ecclesiasticism would be a calamity. Jesus' prayer for the union of his followers was for their union in him. Happy is the home that delights in Christ as its bond of unity. Happy is the fellowship of men that springs from fellowship with Christ. The branches are united in the vine.

The outworking of God's plans is not usually understood by the men who play a part in them. Jesus said: "What I do thou knowest not now, but thou shalt know hereafter." It is faith in God that enables us to say: "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God." It may not be immediate or temporal good. But he works for our ultimate well-being.

Solomon, Rehoboam, Jeroboam—with all their glory and shame—are gone. Their reputation is of no more value to themselves than were the worms that ate their flesh. We can see that the way of wisdom for them would have been to "fear God and keep his commandments,"

as the first of the three once declared for the guidance of others.

Oh, the mercy of God that "endureth forever!" Although the kings and their people sinned, God sought ever to bring them back and to teach them in compassion the way of everlasting life. "Turn ye, turn ye, for why will ye die, O house of Israel?"

We look back upon the time of these events as upon a time of darkness. God's

lamp did not shine then, and for them, as it shines now and for us. We are privileged to see the path of duty and of promise in a clearer light. We may come to Jesus as the host of Israel came to Rehoboam asking for a lightening of our burdens. He will not answer us roughly as a tyrant, but will say, "Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for my yoke is easy and my burden is light, and you shall find rest unto your souls."

Lesson II.

January 8.

JEROBOAM MAKES IDOLS FOR ISRAEL TO WORSHIP.

1 Kings 12:25-13:6. (Verses 25 to 33 printed.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Thou shalt not make unto thee a graven image. Exodus 20:4.

Memory Verses—28 to 30. **Suggested Reading**—1 Kings, chapters 12 and 13.
Time—981 B. C. **Persons**—Jeroboam, Priests of Jeroboam's worship and all the people. **Places**—Shechem, Penuel, Bethel and Dan.

DAILY READINGS.

- Jan. 2..... M—1 Kings 12:25-13:6—Jeroboam Makes Idols for Israel to Worship.
 Jan. 3..... T—Exodus 32:1-35—The Worship of the Golden Calf.
 Jan. 4..... W—Ps. 106:1-46—The Stubborn Idolatry of Israel.
 Jan. 5..... T—1 Kings 13:1-10—The Prophecy Against Jeroboam's Altar.
 Jan. 6..... F—2 Kings 23:15-20—The Prophecy Fulfilled.
 Jan. 7..... S—Hos. 4:1-19—Ephraim is Joined to his Idols.
 Jan. 8..... S—Rom. 6:1-23—The Wages of Sin Is Death.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Shechem. For its situation see the geographical notes on lesson one. Our present lesson informs us that Jeroboam built Shechem. Abimelech had completely destroyed it (Jud. 9:45). There is no subsequent account of this rebuilding until the time of the present lesson, though the fact that Rehoboam's coronation took place here is evidence that it had been restored. The building by Jeroboam refers to the erection of walls, fortifying and otherwise preparing it to be his capital.

The word "build" is used in this sense elsewhere. Cf. Daniel 4:30. It has the same meaning in the inscription on the Moabite stone. Shechem was almost the center of the territory west of the Jordan, and from this point of view was in a favorable position to be the capital, but its situation in the valley prevented its being strongly fortified.

Penuel. On the eastern side of the Jordan (Gen. 32:22; 33:17; Judges 8:8-17), though its exact site now is unknown. It was intended as the capital and the fortress of the territory east of

the Jordan, and had a relation to that region which corresponded exactly to that which Shechem sustained to the section west of the Jordan.

Bethel. Bethel is situated twelve miles north of Jerusalem. One of the earliest instances of its mention in the Old Testament is in the account of Jacob's journey from his home to Padan-Aram (Gen. 28). It had previously borne the name of Luz, but, in commemoration of God's appearance to the patriarch, it henceforth was called Bethel (Gen. 28:19). The significance of its name (house of God) denotes the character of the place. It was a sacred spot, the seat of a shrine. Abram reared an altar to Jehovah not far away (Gen. 12:8). To Jacob it seemed in reality to be a house of God. Here Samuel judged (1 Sam. 7:16), and some kind of worship of Jehovah was carried on here (10:3). It is quite evident, therefore, that Bethel already had sacred associations and it was quite natural for Jeroboam to choose it as one of the sites of his worship. It would not seem to the people to be so decided an innovation

since they had previously gone to Bethel to worship.

Dan. This city is in the far north at the head waters of the Jordan River. Though mentioned earlier (Gen. 14:14, Deut. 34:1), it had no importance until after the time of the conquest when the tribe of Dan captured the city of Leshem (Josh. 19:47) and gave it the name Dan. From this time it was known as the northernmost limit of the land, Judges 20:1, etc. In addition to some smaller streams the Jordan River is fed by two great springs which issue from the base of Mt. Hermon. They are about two and one-half miles apart. The western has an elevated mound rising above the plain on which are the ruins of an ancient city, and this has very generally been identified as the site of Dan, though a few in both ancient and modern times have located it near the other spring and identified it with the New Testament Cæsarea Philippi. In favor of the former, however, is its present name which is 'Tel-el-Kadi. The Arabic word Kadi is the equivalent

of the Hebrew word Dan and both mean "judge." These two mighty springs would be objects of superstitious reverence to an idolatrous people. And there is not a period in ancient history when some god was not identified with the Titanic forces of nature here manifested. One of the many Baalim of the Canaanites was connected with Mt. Hermon (Jos. 11:13, Judges 3:3); the Greek god Pan had his seat here, and in the time of Christ a temple to the Roman Emperor stood near the eastern spring. The worshippers of Jehovah felt the influence of this place. The writer of Psalm 42 borrows his imagery from this spot.

"Therefore do I remember thee from the land of Jordan,
And the Hermons, from the hill Mizar,
Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterfalls;
All thy waves and thy billows are gone over me."

But the associations of the place were essentially idolatrous, and for this reason Jeroboam placed his second image here.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

The previous lesson traced the successful revolt of the Ten Tribes from the authority of Rehoboam. Jeroboam was chosen king of the new kingdom. For his earlier history see 1 Kings 11:26ff. Nothing further is known of his father than that his name was Nebat. His native place was Zereda, which was located in the highlands of Ephraim. He labored on the public works of Solomon in Jerusalem and showed such proficiency that he was promoted to the position of ruler over all the house of Joseph. It is quite probable that the word Joseph is here used in the sense which in the later prophets became quite usual; that is, a designation for all of the ten tribes

as Judah was for the Southern. His position was therefore quite a responsible one. The prophet Ahijah made a prediction to him that he was to become king of the ten tribes. It seems evident that he attempted to hasten the consummation of this and that his actions awakened suspicion on the part of Solomon. He was forced to flee to Egypt and remained there until the death of Solomon (1 Kings 72:20). Since his past had shown him to be a capable man of affairs, he was the popular choice for king. The present lesson shows how he organized his new kingdom and what steps were taken by him to assure its permanency. Between the last lesson and this one no events are recorded.

25 Then Jeroboam built Shechem in the hill-country of Ephraim, and dwelt therein; and he went out from thence, and built Penuel. 26 And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now will the kingdom return to the house of David: 27 if this people go up to offer sacrifices in the house of Jehovah at Jerusalem, then will the heart of this people turn again unto their lord, even unto Rehoboam king of Judah; and they will kill me, and return to Rehoboam king of Judah.

28 Whereupon the king took counsel, and made two calves of gold; and he said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem: behold thy gods, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt. 29 And he set the one in Beth-el, and the other put he in Dan. 30 And this thing became a sin; for the people went to *worship* before the one, even unto Dan. 31 And he made houses of high places, and made priests from among all the people, that were not

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 26. Jeroboam. (See Historical Connection.)

Hill country: The name for that broken territory which is west of the Jordan valley, east of the Maritime Plain, south of the Plain of Esdraelon, and north of the higher land possessed by the tribe of Judah. It was hill country proper, whereas Judah is mountainous region, though the latter is sometimes called hill country (Luke 1:39). Shechem was almost the center of this region.

Shechem and Penuel. (See Geographical Notes.)

26. The fears of Jeroboam were well founded. While the political union with Judah was broken, the religious tie yet remained. Jeroboam seeks to perfect the rupture by dissolving this also.

27. **Offer sacrifices in the house of Jehovah:** The law required the people to make three annual visits to Jerusalem. **They will kill me:** This was actually done in the case of Ishbosheth when release was sought from the rule of a king of which they had grown tired (2 Sam. 4:7.)

28. **Took counsel:** "With his counselors or the heads of the people who had helped to make him king" (Keil). The blame, however, is always attached to Jeroboam alone. **Two calves:** Jeroboam's recent sojourn in Egypt, where bulls were

objects of worship, would incline him to make his gods in this shape, and the example of Aaon would strongly influence the people to accept them. The language used by Jeroboam is identical with that used by Aaron, which shows that he had this incident in mind and that he appealed to it as a precedent (Ex. 32:4-8). **Of gold:** They were mollen (14:9) and were probably made of brass which was then gilded after the process described in Isaiah 40:19. **It is too much, etc.:** The marginal reading is to be preferred. "You have gone up to Jerusalem long enough." The Septuagint and the Fulgate both so understood the Hebrew text.

29. **Bethel:** Dan (See Geographical Notes.)

30 **Became:** It was a sin and it became a still greater sin. The use of this verb emphasizes the fact that the sin developed into a yet more grievous sin. See 1 Kings 14:16, 15:26, and often. **For the people went, etc.:** The Hebrew is quite abbreviated, but the meaning is clear. They went to the one and to the other: they went even to the one at distant Dan.

31. **High places:** Originally the Canaanites, like other nations, had built their altars on the top of hills. Later any altar site, even though it might be in a valley (Jer. 7:31), was called a high place.

of the sons of Levi. **32** And Jeroboam ordained a feast in the eighth month, on the fifteenth day of the month, like unto the feast that is in Judah, and he went up unto the altar; so did he in Beth-el, sacrificing unto the calves that he had made: and he placed in Beth-el the priests of the high places that he had

made. **33** And he went up unto the altar which he had made in Beth-el on the fifteenth day in the eighth month, even in the month which he had devised of his own heart: and he ordained a feast for the children of Israel, and went up unto the altar, to burn incense.

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This means merely that Jeroboam erected some kind of a structure, whether small or extensive we have no means of knowing, which served as a temple to hold the image. The writer calls it by this name as a term of reproach. He will not call it a temple. Priests from among all of the people! Not from the lowest of the people, as the Authorized Version says, but from all classes. The Hebrew is, literally, "from the ends of the people," that is, from all ranks. According to the law of Moses a priest must be a descendant of Levi, but Jeroboam required no other qualification than willingness to serve.

32 A feast: The feast of Tabernacles

came on the fifteenth day of the seventh month (Lev. 23:34). This new feast came, therefore, exactly one month later. But this feast day was chosen, probably, not that it might come on the same day of the month as the old feast, but because the moon was then full. It was placed a month later because it would better suit the later vintage of the northern tribes. (Stanley.) It served to make the separation complete. (Keil.) **Went up unto:** See margin. He officiated as high priest. He thus identified the kingly and the priestly offices. In **Bethel:** Bethel rather than Dan was made the royal shrine. The former was, therefore, the more important.

COMMENTS.

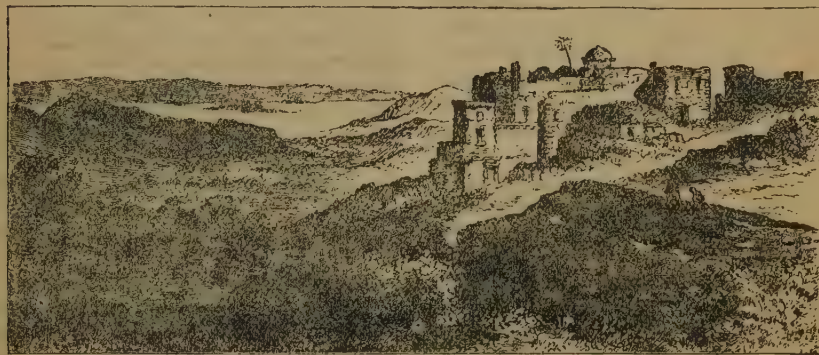
Strength of Nations Consists not in Fortresses Alone. (v. 25.) Jeroboam strengthened his country by the erection of fortresses. He was wise in selecting the locations, since he chose cities that would protect the two parts of his territory into which it was divided by natural features. He did not have an eye for impregnable positions, for Shechem could never be made a strong fortress. It was soon supplanted by Tirzah. But Jeroboam was shrewd enough to know that fortresses alone can never be the safeguard of a nation. As the life of a man consists not in the abundance of the things which he possesses, so the tranquil and happy life of a nation does not consist in armies, navies and strongholds.

In modern times we have heard much about the man behind the gun. Some months ago we had our first instance of a ship with many passengers being saved by means of wireless telegraphy. Our chief praise was for the hero who sent the message for help. The man counts for more than the machine. So the spirit and unity of the nation count for more than organization and armament. Jeroboam was aware of this and he bent his efforts to the achievement of union and separation. He wished them to be united among themselves and possessed of some unique characteristics which would give to them the feeling that they were unlike other people. They were to be a peculiar people and were to glory in their peculiarity so that they would

seek union with no other nation. In this way Jeroboam sought to create a national spirit. But his mistake was that he sought to do this at the expense of God and his religion. He accomplished his purpose. The ten tribes from this time stand as a unit among the nations, but this unity was secured at the expense of truth, and no unity which ignores truth can be enduring.

Religion is the True Bulwark of the

life. In the beginning the kingdom was rendered to him on a condition "and it shall be, if thou wilt hearken unto all that I command thee, and wilt walk in my ways, and do that which is right in my eyes, to keep my statutes and my commandments as David, my servant, did; that I will be with thee, and will build thee a sure house as I built for David, and I will give Israel unto thee (1 Kings-11:38). Jeroboam ignored this



THE SITE OF ANCIENT BETHEL.

Nation. Notwithstanding his mistake, Jeroboam bore witness to a great truth. The faith of a people is their greatest element of power, and the nearer that faith approximates the truth the greater becomes its power to uphold. This was especially true of God's chosen people. Its one peculiar possession was its religion. Other peoples had lands as fertile; other peoples possessed more bravery and prowess; wealth and wisdom were the endowments of other nations to a greater degree, but no other nation than Israel had Jehovah. Anything which robbed them of him destroyed them. Their possession of him was symbolized by certain institutions, such as the law with its commands, its altars and its national observances. These Jeroboam altered, and in doing so he destroyed their religion, which was equivalent to destroying their national

condition. He began his career by fostering rebellion against Solomon, and followed this by what was practically rebellion against God.

Jeroboam's Motive. (v. 27.) In the previous lesson it was noted that selfishness was the ruling passion in the breast of Rehoboam and all his force. It was self-interest, likewise, which prompted Jeroboam in the policy which he inaugurated. It was not religious conviction which led him to set up a golden calf at Bethel. He said to Israel, "Behold thy gods, O Israel," but his heart did not tell him that this was his god. It was not done for conscience' sake. There was no belief in his breast that this product of the artificer's skill was a real deity. It was all sham, a miserable effort to deceive his people. He would enslave them to a vain superstition in order that he and his dynasty might be secured upon th

throne. Such a course was short-sighted, for no enduring structure can be erected upon deception. Further, it was a flat contradiction to the message of the prophet (11:38), and in the early years of the reign of his son and successor it produced the downfall of his house.

Behold thy Gods. It was not Jeroboam's purpose to introduce idolatry, nor are these images to be thought of as idols. He designed them to be symbols of Jehovah, and by means of them gratified that deeply implanted desire of mankind to have its deity represented to it as an object of sense. Israel was always prone to turn away from the purely spiritual conception of God, which law-giver and prophet sought to implant, and adopt a more material one. Jeroboam probably thought that these images would induce worship. His arguments in their favor were precisely those produced by the Roman Catholics in favor of the use of pictures in their worship, and, like them again, Jeroboam would have protested that the images were not worshiped, but, he would have said, they were to stimulate the mind, and the worship is paid to the deity which is symbolized by the image. He did not intend to make any substantial change in the religion of his people. He thought of it as the same religion which they had in the days of the united kingdom. He had introduced some changes which adapted it to their new condition. Jeroboam was not a polytheist; he can not even be said to be an idolater. He might have said that his images did not violate the first law of the Decalogue, for he had made no other god, yet he had certainly violated the second, for he had made an image.

This Became a Sin. (v. 30.) The use of the progressive verb "became" instead of the simple copula "was" points to the truth that this sin, like every other one, had in it the principle of growth. Sin is cumulative. We are accustomed to regard our deeds as isolated acts without bearing on our later life, whereas each

deed contributes its part in shaping us for good or for bad. Jeroboam's idea was that his images should be nothing more than representations of Jehovah, but the people could not be trusted to hold to this conception. They quickly passed to the worship of them. Of the earlier kings it is said that all walked in the sin of Jeroboam (15:26-34, 16:26), but before long there arose a king who "went and served Baal and worshiped him" (16:31). This was not an accident, but was the inevitable outcome of Jeroboam's policy. In truth, the historian notes the fact that an early king exceeded the sin of Jeroboam (16:25). It is in exactly this way that Paul pictures the downward course of heathendom when once it had abandoned the conception of the incorruptible God (Rom. 1:23). There is the same principle of progress in other sins and in virtues likewise. Whenever we have adopted a course of life, we may never delude ourselves with the belief that we shall always remain at that same stage. There must be progress or death. It is this which has led men to represent the way of life upward and the road of death as downward.

Church and State. The action of Jeroboam is a forcible illustration of the peril which besets the worship of God whenever it is made subordinate to the civil government. Most Protestant countries are happily free from such corrupting influences, but wherever they exist, or wherever the worship of God is made to serve political purposes of any kind, it is almost certainly subject to corrupting influences. All sorts of selfish aims may lead to the altering of this institution or that observance. Jeroboam, for political reasons, abolished the law which insisted upon the purity of the priesthood, and the feast was postponed one month. These seemed to be small matters, but they were the first steps in the course of events which led to the overthrow of Jehovah's worship. The individual conscience is the only safeguard of the true faith.

God Was Not Without Witnesses.

(16:1, 2.) But this national lapse was not unanimous. There were some who did not bow to Jeroboam's image and who saw in the introduction of these changes cause for alarm. It is a brave man who dares to lift his voice in protest against such universal defection. There was one, at least, who dared to do this. The action of the older prophet shows that there were some others who were dissatisfied, though they were too timid to utter their misgivings by way of protest. They needed a leader, and the young prophet who came from Judah was the man of the hour to express their dissent. He came as a spokesman of God and was the first in a long line of prophets who were not willing that Israel should hasten down its way to ruin without their voice being heard in warning and disapproval.

"Signs for Those that Believe Not." (13:2-3.) The prophet did not come without divine attestation. It would have been strange if no one had demanded his authority even as they demanded the authority of Jesus. He was to speak a message from God, to pronounce a threat and proclaim a doom. There was need that his word have support. He made a prediction that was to have its fulfillment generations afterward, but for this very reason it was without immediate benefit in producing belief in his message. A further sign that had more immediate effect was the rending of the altar and the withering of the king's arm. With this triple sign the prophet attested his divine message and confirmed the hearts of those who had misgiving as to the correctness of Jeroboam's worship. No doubt that same hearty support which was previously accorded him failed the king in many other quarters. The hearts of God's saints were strengthened, and evil doers were discomfited. This was the design of the prophet's message. We need not think it a failure because he did not convert the king from his purpose. A

prophet was rarely able to turn effectually and completely a people from its evil course. Nor is the prophet's untimely end to be reckoned as proof of failure. His death spoke more convincingly than his life. God's prophet fell, but his work went on.

Chastened, but Not for His Good. (13:4-6.) The king is presented in various moods, but one is lacking. He was first defiant and his outstretched hand makes the gesture and his lips speak the command to arrest God's fearless messenger. His fixed and withered hand humbled his pride, however, and fear for his personal safety takes the place of his defiance. The prophet that he had threatened with violence, he now cringingly supplicates. He craved the prayer of a man whom a moment ago he would have consigned to the dungeon. And when the prophet's prevailing prayer had secured for the king the restoration of his arm, he is humble and has at least a temporary gratitude for the prophet, but none for the prophet's God. He would take the prophet to his house and give him a reward; but will not go to God's house nor pay him worship. The prophet's warning and the divine infliction seem to have made no impression upon Jeroboam. He was as disobedient as ever. In this lies the explanation of why the prophet did not more thoroughly succeed. The king hardened his heart and went his stubborn way to his own ruin and his nation's doom. He began his career with an act of deception for selfish purposes, and such characters are almost, if not altogether, beyond hope. There is something which man must bring to the aid of God, or even the divine effort will prove unavailing. It is what Jesus in the parable of the Sower calls "an honest and a good heart." This Jeroboam did not have, and its lack led him, all who followed him, and even those who sought to aid him, on to failure and to ruin.

THE LESSON STORY.

The sacred historian tells but little concerning the ancestry of Jeroboam. His father, Nebat, of the tribe of Ephraim, dying while his son was yet a boy, left him to the care of his widowed mother, Zeruah, whose reputation seems not to have been above reproach. Her home was at Zereda, in the mountains of Ephraim. Grown to manhood in the reign of Solomon and having proved himself "a young man diligent in business," he was given an office of rank and responsibility. As overseer over the house of Joseph, he so greatly extended his influence and popularity with Ephraim and Manasseh, that, when Solomon died, all Israel was ready to make him king.

On coming to the throne he added buildings and fortifications to Shechem on the west and ~~and then~~ to Peniel on the east side of ~~the~~ Jordan, in order to protect and strengthen his kingdom. But while seeking to do so he was neglecting the only real source of strength and security, and forgetting that the perpetuity of his throne depended not upon fortresses, but upon simple obedience to God's law.

As infidelity in the life invariably begets doubt, so Jeroboam soon began to doubt God's promise, his people and himself. Even before giving expression to the fear, he said in his heart that if Israel continued to worship in Jerusalem they would return to the house of David and he would lose both his throne and his life.

So, after advising with the tribal leaders, he decided that not only must they throw off the political, but the religious yoke of Judah, and, as a means of bring-

ing this about he made two golden calves and placed one in Bethel, a little north of Jerusalem, and the other in Dan, in the extreme north of Israel, near Mount Hermon. He argued that the people had gone up to Jerusalem long enough and that these shrines were more ancient and much more accessible than the city of David.

Bent upon a complete change—not only in the place, but also in the plan of worship—he made high places and, departing from the Aaronic priesthood, selected priests from the rank and file of Israel.

Taking still another step downward in idolatry, he established new feast days, in order to break up the old happy feast-day gatherings in Jerusalem.

The next sacrilegious act was to offer sacrifices upon the southern altar which he had erected. While doing so "a man of God," sent to him out of Judah, gave him solemn warning of his danger and doom. At this the enraged king called on his men to seize the prophet and tried himself to lay hold upon him, but immediately his outstretched hand was withered and the altar was rent by an earthquake.

At the entreaty of Jeroboam, and the prophet's prayer, his hand was restored. Then followed another warning when this "man of God," himself, fell, having been tempted, on his way home, to disobey God through the aged but lying prophet of Bethel. Yet, all in vain were the warnings to Jeroboam, for, in spite of his withered hand, the earthquake and the death of the prophet, "he returned not from his evil way."

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

(See Suggestions on Former Lesson.)

1. What are some of the seeds of national decay?

2. Will, or will not, the purposes and promises of God depend upon the willingness of his people?

3. What is the necessary principle or basis of true religious union?

4. How does the character of Christ contrast with that of Rehoboam in refusing the old men's counsel?

5. What reason have we for thinking of Christ as the Lamp of David. Psa. 18:28; 132:17; 27:1. Isa. 40:19, 20; 2 Sam. 22:29; Matt. 21:9-15.

6. Whom especially are church mem-

bers taught to obey? 1 Thess. 5:12, 13; Heb. 13:7, 17.

7. Name a few qualities in a safe and worthy ruler? John 10:11, 27; 2 Sam. 23:3, 4; 1 Kings 3:5-10; 1 Pet. 5:1-3.

HELPFUL QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. What two places did Jeroboam build and where were they? 1 Kings 12:25.

2. Why did he wish to break the religious bond between the two kingdoms? 1 Kings 12:26, 27.

3. What method did he employ to break it? 1 Kings 12:28-31.

4. What effect did his policy have upon his subjects? 1 Kings 12:30.

5. How did he vary the time of the feast he ordained, from the feast ordained of God in Jerusalem? 1 Kings 12:32; Lev. 23:33, 34.

6. How did he change the priesthood? 1 Kings 12:31.

7. At what two places did the king set up the "gods"? 1 Kings 12:29.

8. What tragical interference did the Lord make after the new worship was established? 1 Kings 13:1, 2.

9. Who was offering the burnt incense in Bethel when the prophet came? 1 Kings 13:1.

10. What sign did the prophet give to king Jeroboam? 1 Kings 13:3.

11. What king did the prophet say would offer priests upon the altar? 1 Kings 13:2 Read 2 Kings 23:15-16.

12. What judgment came upon Jeroboam? 1 Kings 13:4.

13. How was the king relieved of the judgment? 1 Kings 13:6.

14. What invitation did Jeroboam extend to the prophet? 1 Kings 13:7.

15. What sin did the old prophet of Bethel commit? 1 Kings 13:18.

16. What sin did the prophet from Judah commit? 1 Kings 13:19.

17. Did this warning profit Jeroboam? 1 Kings 12:33, 34.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. It was easy for the young prophet to resist Jeroboam and to yield to the old prophet's deception. A gray head is a crown of glory, if found in the way of the Lord, but when its claim of reverence is prostituted to leading men astray it is indeed a badge of shame and perversity. Old men should be examples to the young.

2. The old prophet's soft sentiment about his burial and bones beside the young prophet's bones could not atone for his sin any more than Balaam's wish to "die the death of the righteous" and Judah's remorse could atone for theirs.

3. We are in constant need of the caution to beware of "wolves in sheep's clothing." Professors of religion are

able to do more harm than recognized apostates. Those "whose eyes are open," as were Balaam's eyes, may still speak perversely. Those who know much about Jesus, as Judas knew his resort, may yet betray him.

4. Satan has a great variety of guiles. "There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death." He can appear as an angel of light. The young prophet should have stuck to the first, clear, sure testimony. 1 Kings 13:1.

5. Convenience in religion is often a delusion and a snare. "It is too far to the house of worship." "It is too cold or too hot to attend the Bible school, or too rainy." "Jerusalem is not essen-

tial. Dan or Bethel will do as well." "The form is not important. It is the spirit that counts." "There are as many good people in Israel as in Judah. All are trying to get to the same place." "The calves will make God seem more real." Such excuses as these for not doing what God commands are common to-day. Mary's saying to the servants at Cana is imperative now: "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."

6. Whatever is loved or served more than Christ, serves as an idol. "Suffer me first to go and bury my father," was answered by, "Follow me, and leave the dead to bury their own dead." Matt. 8:22. "If any man cometh unto me and hateth not his own father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he can not be my disciple." Luke 14:26. In other words, Jesus must be so absolutely and triumphantly *first* that our attachment to him in comparison with our devotion to our dearest relatives in the flesh will be as love to hate. And yet, paradoxical as it might seem, the more devoted we are to Christ the more we love our parents and children.

7. Better to have a millstone about

one's neck and be cast into the sea, than to cause another to stumble into sin, as did Jeroboam and the old prophet. A sect may have its idols. If Christ were all in all there would be no need of divisive names, or human creeds, or human tests of fellowship, or for disunion in the church.

Perhaps the most remarkable defect in the character of Jeroboam was the absence of faith in Jehovah. God had given him a wonderful promise. 1 Kings 11:37-38. God intended that his nation should be righteous, as well as every family and every church. "Blessed is the nation whose God is Jehovah." Psa. 33:12.

Armies and forts, calves, priests, high places and altars could not save the nation. "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." The most hopeless sin is the sin of shutting God out of one's faith, hope and love—shutting out the only one who can save from sin. All other sins may be forgiven but this sin. Great, indeed, was the opportunity of Jeroboam if he had but obeyed God, according to the message and counsel of God through the prophet Ahijah the Shilonite.

Lesson III.

January 15.

ASA'S GOOD REIGN IN JUDAH.

2 Chron. 15:1-15.

GOLDEN TEXT—Be ye strong therefore, and let not your hands be weak; for your work shall be rewarded. 2 Chron. 15:7.

Memory Verses—1, 2. **Suggested Reading**—2 Chron. 14-16, and 1 Kings 15:9-24. **Time**—15th year of the reign of Asa (ver. 10) 948 B. C. **Persons**—Azariah, the son of Oded; Asa; all Judah and many of Israel. **Places**—All the land of Judah, the land of Benjamin and the cities of the hill country of Ephraim.

DAILY READINGS.

- Jan. 9.....M—2 Chron. 15:1-15—Asa's Good Reign in Judah.
 Jan. 10.... T—2 Chron. 14:1-8, 1 Kings 15:9-15—Asa's Zeal for the Lord.
 Jan. 11.... W—2 Chron. 16:1-6—Asa's Appeal for Foreign Aid.
 Jan. 12.... T—2 Chron. 14:9-15—Asa's Victory over Zerah, the Ethiopian.
 Jan. 13.... F—2 Chron. 15:1-19—The Prophecy of Oded.
 Jan. 14.... S—2 Chron. 16:7-14—Asa's Reproof by Hanani, the Seer.
 Jan. 15.... S—Ps. 16:1-11—The Reward of Serving the Lord.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Judah and Benjamin. The boundaries of the two kingdoms are by this time fixed. The kingdom of Judah included all of the territory originally allotted to that tribe and in addition the territory belonging to Simeon and Benjamin. The border line of this region was determined on the east and south by natural features. The valley of the Jordan and the Dead Sea washed its eastern limits. On the south the beginning of the desert was the line beyond which only Nomads dwelt. To the west the mountain wall of Judah proper broke down into the hill country, the Shephelah, and beyond this was the Maratime Plain, the land of the Philistines. Only at rare intervals was this a part of the kingdom of Judah, and it is not likely that Asa ruled it. The northern border was a shifting line. No physical feature, neither mountain nor ravine, forms a natural boundary line between the northern and southern kingdoms, and whether this line was north or south depended upon the relative strength of the two

kingdoms at the time. During the reign of Asa one of the periodic wars over this country between the two was fought. At the time of the separation, Bethel, which is only twelve miles north of Jerusalem, was well within the territory of Israel, insomuch that Jeroboam made it the seat of his royal shrine. Baasha, king of Israel, in an effort to push the borders of his territory even nearer Jerusalem, commenced the fortification of Ramah, which is but four miles north of that city. To free himself from this threatened danger Asa paid a sum of money to Ben-hadad, king of Syria, in return for which the latter invaded the northern territory of Israel and plundered a number of cities. This compelled Baasha to desist from his efforts to fortify Ramah and Asa used his material to fortify Geba and Mizpah (2 Chron. 16:1-6; 1 Kings 15:16-22.) Supported by these fortified strongholds it seems that Asa was able to control some cities which were within the proper limits of Israel. (v. 8).

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

Rehoboam reigned for seventeen years. They were years of weakness and decay. As was described in the lesson for January 1, he lost the largest part and the richest of his territory. Then Egypt, which had been the ally of his father, invaded Judah and despoiled the kingdom and the temple of much of its treasure (1 Kings 14:25-28). But this was not the only calamity which the country suffered. There were foes within as well as without. Religion and morals were alike corrupted (1 Kings 14:22-24). Rehoboam had no deeply-seated moral and religious convictions. He made no effort to direct the will and worship of the people towards Jehovah. The evil influences set adrift during the closing years of Solomon's reign continue, as did also the nation's apostasy. Irregular forms of worship, idolatry polytheism, with all of the moral degradation which these involved, took firm root. Rehoboam's reign was followed by a brief one of three years. Abijam, his son, succeeded him and during his short reign fought with Jeroboam (2 Chron. 13:1-20), multiplied wives (2 Chron. 13:

21), and rivaled his father in corruption and immorality (1 Kings 15:3). It is noted by both the author of Kings and by the chronicler that his wife (1 Kings 15:13 and 2 Chron. 15:16) was a thorough-going idolater. The nation was politically, morally and religiously at a low ebb when Asa came to the throne. His age is not given, but he had a long reign of forty-one years. He was a man of vigorous and forcible character, of good morals, and was a devout worshiper of God. It is somewhat singular that with an evil father and an idolatrous mother, he should have been of such a disposition. Neither historian gives us the slightest clue to an explanation of this mystery. He purged the land of idolatry and idolatrous objects (2 Chron. 14:2-5), though he did not molest the high places which were connected with the irregular worship of Jehovah (1 Kings 15:14). Though he had this and some other defects, as a whole his life and reign were exemplary. He organized his kingdom and strengthened his army (2 Chron. 14:6-8.) He had to meet one foreign invasion, but was able to repel this attack (2 Chron. 11:9-15).

THE BOOK OF CHRONICLES.

This and one other lesson of this quarter are taken from the second book of Chronicles. The marked differences between this book and Kings require some notice of its character. It was evidently written much later than Kings; in fact, a considerable time after the return from the Babylonian captivity. The history is brought down to the end of the exile and mention is made of the restoration by Cyrus (2 Chron. 36:21-22). The genealogy of Zerubbabel is extended to the time of Alexander the Great (1 Chron. 3:19-24). The character of the spelling, the nature of the language, and the

Aramean complexion of both suggest a late date. The writer was, therefore, neither a contemporary nor an original writer. He was a compiler and an abridger. He had before him, as he wrote, many ancient books, and to these he freely referred. All of these sources except the Canonical book of Kings have now perished. The compiler of Chronicles was interested in genealogies, in lists and numbers, and especially in the religious lapses and reformations of Judah. In fact, his narrative is a religious history of Judah. Whenever he tells of a war it is to show that the defeat was due to sin against the Lord, or

1 And the Spirit of God came upon Azariah the son of Oded: 2 and he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin: Jehovah is with you, while ye are

with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you. 3 Now for a long season Israel was without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and with-

the victory was owing to trust in the divine power. The mere rise and fall of kings has but little interest to him; the all-important question to this author is the moral and religious attitude of the ruler. "While it is true that imagination has here a wide field, and that not all epochs receive equally careful attention, nevertheless both author and editor acted in good faith, for the latter only arranged the matter which he extracted from the former, where he employed new material, cited his sources, and his statements could be verified. The picture of the beginning of the cult, which the chronicler and his forerunner carried in their souls, may be totally different from that of modern critics, but the material which underlies that picture they neither invented, nor did they purposely change its meaning." (Klostermann.) The character of Chronicles and its difference from Kings can be observed from no section of the book better than in the history of Asa. Kings devotes to him a section of fifteen verses

(1 Kings 15:9-14). It tells briefly of his coming to the throne, his personal character and religious reformation. More than half of the space is devoted to the war with Baasha and Asa's league with Ben-Hadad. No word of censure nor approval of his conduct is uttered, nor does the author draw from the incident any religious lesson. The chronicler takes three chapters to tell of Asa's reign (2 Chron. 14-16). He has precisely the same outline for his narration which the author of Kings had, but in addition to telling more explicitly of his religious acts and reformation, he introduces as wholly new matter accounts of a war with Zerah, the Ethiopian, and the reformation which is described in our lesson. In telling of the war with Baasha he censures him for calling the Syrian to his aid, rather than trusting to Jehovah. In his old age Asa suffered from some disease of the feet, and in this matter, too, the chronicler finds his conduct lacking, inasmuch that he trusted in the physician, to the neglect of God.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 1. The Spirit of God came: A usual phrase to denote that a man was under the control of the Spirit and spoke by inspiration. (See Numbers 24:2; 2 Chron. 20:14; 24:20). **Azariah, the son of Oded:** He is not mentioned elsewhere than in this chapter.

2. To meet Asa: He was returning from his victorious battle with the Ethiopian. **Jehovah is with you, etc.:** The doctrine of Azariah was a commonplace of the prophets (1 Chron. 28:9; 2 Chron. 24:20; Jer. 29:11-14). His language was

virtually, though not verbally, a quotation from Deut. 4:29.

3. Now for a long season: The Hebrew is literally "many days were to Israel." Hence the meaning is "many a time has Israel," etc. **Israel:** Since the Hebrew verb may be interpreted either as a future or a past, commentators are divided as to whether this is a prediction or a statement of a past event. The use of the word Israel seems to point to a time before the division. Hence it is a lesson from the past. **Without the**

out law: 4 but when in their distress they turned unto Jehovah, the God of Israel, and sought him, he was found of them. 5 And in those times there was no peace to him that went out, nor to him that came in; but great vexations were upon all the inhabitants of the lands. 6 And they were broken in pieces, nation against nation, and city against city; for God did vex them with all adversity. 7 But be ye strong, and let not your hands be slack; for your work shall be rewarded.

8 And when Asa heard these words, and the prophecy of Oded the prophet,

he took courage, and put away the abominations out of all the land of Judah and Benjamin, and out of the cities which he had taken from the hill-country of Ephraim; and he renewed the altar of Jehovah, that was before the porch of Jehovah. 9 And he gathered all Judah and Benjamin, and them that sojourned with them out of Ephraim and Manasseh, and out of Simeon: for they fell to him out of Israel in abundance, when they saw that Jehovah his God was with him. 10 So they gathered themselves together at Jerusalem in the third month, in the fifteenth year of the reign of Asa.

true God, etc.: The reference is probably to the time of the Judges.

4. Proof of his principle stated in verse 2. For instance, see Judges 3:9-15; 4:3; 6:7; 10:10; etc.

5, 6. At the time described in verse 3, when Israel was atheistic, priestless and lawless Lands: The different sections or districts into which the land was divided, the Jordan valley, the hill country of Ephraim, the Great Plain, etc. Nation against nation: Tribe destroyed tribe, as in Judges 20:33-48. Cf. Judges 9:45.

8. Oded: Almost all possible explanations have been offered to account for the fact that in this verse we have the name of his father rather than that of the prophet. (See v. 1.) The most probable explanation is that a scribe has omitted the words "Azariah, the son of." All the ancient translations have this phrase. Took courage and put away the abominations: Asa had carried on some reforms earlier (2 Chron. 14:3-5). These had not been thoroughgoing. He now "takes courage" and renews and perfects his reformation. Cities which he had taken from the hill country of Ephraim: The commentators find trouble over the fact that the war between Asa

and Baasha is described later than this. They seem to have overlooked the fact that Baasha must have died, according to the figures of 1 Kings 15:33, in the twenty-seventh year of Asa. Hence their war came early in Asa's reign. There is manifestly some error in the date of this war (2 Chron. 16:1), for in the thirty-sixth year of Asa, Baasha had already been dead nine years. Renewed the altar: This was the altar of burnt offerings. (2 Chron. 4:1; 8:12.) It had now been built and in use for about sixty-four years (1 Kings 6:38; 11:42; 14:21; 15:2; 2 Chron. 15:10) and was in need of renewal.

9. Sojourned: This is the word used of Gentiles, who, for a time, made their home among the Israelites. It shows how complete the separation between the two kingdoms had become. Jehovah, his God, was with him: The times in Judah must have been prosperous. Simeon: The tribe of Simeon had become thoroughly scattered, as was predicted in Genesis 49:7. Cf. 1 Chron. 4:39-43.

10. Third month: Corresponds to our month of June. This shows that Zerah's invasion was in spring, the usual time for ancient wars. Cf. 2 Sam. 11:1.

11 And they sacrificed unto Jehovah in that day, of the spoil which they had brought, seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep. 12 And they entered into the covenant to seek Jehovah, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and with all their soul; 13 and that whosoever would not seek Jehovah, the God of Israel, should be put to death,

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11. Spoil: Of the war just happily ended.

12. The covenant: The original covenant is to be found in Exodus 24:6-8. For other renewals see 2 Kings 23:3

whether small or great, whether man or woman. 14 And they swore unto Jehovah with a loud voice, and with shouting, and with trumpets, and with cornets. 15 And all Judah rejoiced at the oath; for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them: and Jehovah gave them rest round about.

and Nehemiah 10:28-39.

13. This stringent regulation is not mentioned in other renewals of the covenant. It was commanded, however, in the law (Ex. 22:20).

COMMENTS.

Background. Asa has now been king for fifteen years. He commenced his reign in a dark hour for the nation. Three kings had preceded him, who had led their people from God, rather than toward him. The worship of Jehovah was corrupted and those who still served him did so irregularly. But worse than this the great majority in the nation served other gods. The kings and their courts had led in this corrupt influence. Asa's mother was patroness of a shrine or temple containing an Asherah. It seemed almost too much to expect that good will come from such an environment. Yet Asa, from the very beginning, seeks the ways of God. His first task was "to pluck up, to break down and to destroy and to overthrow." This he does thoroughly and well. The symbols and the images of idolatry are removed. He gave command that people should seek the Lord. His arm was strong against those who fostered idolatry. Even his own mother was removed from the kingly dignity. But at this point Asa's reforming work seemed to have lagged. More material tasks consumed his time and his energy. He built cities and fortified strongholds. Prosperity visited the

nation once more. Strangers thronged in to make their homes in this favored land. In this way fifteen years of Asa's reign passed. There is a great work which he has not yet attempted. It is the constructive work of renewing and fully restoring the worship of Jehovah. God prepares Asa for this by subjecting his nation and himself to a rude shock that reveals to them wherein their strength lies. A mighty horde of Ethiopians, fresh from victory over the Nile valley, thronged over the borders of Egypt and spread themselves over the southern approaches to Asa's kingdom. His small army seemed impotent before such a mighty host, but the battle is not to the strong, nor the race to the swift. God gave him the victory, and as he returned enriched with the booty that he had taken, God's messengers met him and gave him a charge which Asa interpreted to mean that he should more thoroughly restore the worship of Jehovah. This requires constructive work. He had destroyed the false, but can he renew the true. Not every reformer can do this. William Farel was able to destroy Catholicism in Geneva, but he was unable to erect Protestantism in its place. He was

compelled to summon John Calvin for this work. Our lesson for this week tells how Asa built the true worship of God over the ruins of idolatry which he had made.

God's Message to the Victor. (v. 2.) It should be noted that God's prophet does not congratulate the victor. He had done a great work and he had done it

for God's help. God has been with Asa in his campaign and purposes to extend his aid in the future, but the divine assistance is on condition that Asa serve and honor him. "Jehovah is with you while you are with him." God has been with no one in the past, nor will he extend aid in the future to any one, unless this condition is complied with. He is



MODERN JERUSALEM.

in the name of the Lord, but there is no hour of peril like that which is flushed with victory. No one needs warning more than the one who has done well. Loyola made Xavier his own by helping him to triumph and then by meeting him with warnings and such questions as, "What does it profit?" In this same way God prepares Asa for his great work.

God's Conditions. (v. 2.) God's promise and God's aid are always subject to certain conditions. These conditions do not nullify God's grace or mercy. They make it stand forth more surely as grace, for the condition imposed is such that it can never be construed as payment

never found unless he is sought. He never forsakes unless he has been previously forsaken. The past of Asa and the past of others is no guarantee for the future. The present must be spent in God's service, if we hope for God's aid in the present. "To-day is the day of salvation."

Israel's History. (vs. 3-6.) The prophet's review of Israel's history agrees with that which was spoken by former and by later prophets. The details mentioned by him seem to indicate that he has in mind the age of the Judges, and this period differs from others only in the degree of their wandering from Jehovah and in the intensity and the fre-

quency with which calamities fell upon the nation. Idolatry was ingrained in the people of Jerusalem and Judah. Ezekiel, with biting scorn, says to Jerusalem, "Your mother was a Hittite and your father an Amorite" (16:45). It was almost inevitable that the people should lapse into frequent apostasy. The prophets were engaged in the great task of eradicating this ingrained tendency to idolatry from the people of God. It was done at last, but it was after a long and persistent struggle. The prophet Azariah reminds the king and his subjects of Israel's dark past and cites for their profit the consequences of their conduct. Apostasy means national ruin, yet whenever sought God may be found. Judah has recently passed through a period of apostasy. The king and his people are advised of this and exhorted, "Be ye strong, and let not your hands be slack, for your work shall be rewarded." Two facts about God are certain. He punishes the sinful and he rewards the faithful.

The Spiritual Strengthen the Temporal. (vs. 8, 9.) In the last lesson it was noted that one of the sins of Israel was the fact that Jeroboam was using the spiritual power as the tool with which to strengthen the secular power. In this lesson we have these two adjusted to one another as they should be. One does not rule over the other, but they work together in harmony. This has its natural effect. A tide of immigration sets in from Ephraim and Manasseh, weakening these tribes and strengthening Judah.

The Solemn Covenant. (vs. 10-14.) The preliminaries have been completed. The nation has been purified of idolatry and the altar has been renewed. The people convene in solemn assembly, sacrifices of thanksgiving in great abundance are offered from the spoil taken

in war. Then in imitation of the great and solemn covenant, by the ratification of which the relation between God and Israel was originally fixed, the king and the people pledged themselves to two things. First, "to seek Jehovah, the God of their fathers" (v. 12.) This was manifestly right and, as the prophet had pointed out a short time before, on their doing this depended their prosperity. Second, to "put to death" whosoever did not seek Jehovah (v. 13.) This strikes us as hard, and the Bible's account of Israel's doing this very thing has been the subject of considerable criticism. From the Christian point of view it is indefensible. Jesus would have enjoined in such case a prayer for the wrongdoer, rather than the putting of him to death. It is one of the dark blemishes of the Christian Church that has too often treated its heretics and even the unconverted according to the standard of Israel. But the circumstances of that remote age were quite unlike those which prevail to-day. To have treated idolatries in Jerusalem with consideration and with charity would have issued in the submerging of the chosen people in a flood of idolatry and consequent immorality and the disappearance of the true faith. From the standpoint of God's purpose in Israel, this severe measure was profitable, yea, necessary. Idolatry was not only sin against God, it was treason against the nation. Freedom of conscience would have meant chaos and anarchy. So when Judah took that solemn oath, swearing to it "with all their heart," it simply meant the adoption of means by which their national existence was to be maintained, and this in turn signified the continued existence of God's worship. Their action and their covenant met with God's approval. "Jehovah gave them rest round about."

THE LESSON STORY.

The idolatrous reign of Rehoboam and the brief, but no less wicked, career of his son, Abijah, were followed by "Asa's good reign in Judah." It is hard to account for the righteous acts of this king with such terribly wicked parents and grandparents. It may be well in an age when much emphasis is being laid upon heredity and environment, to consider the life of one who, in spite of grossly idolatrous ancestors, and being surrounded by a people steeped in idolatry, "did that which was good and right in the eyes of Jehovah his God." Of course we should not ignore the aid given him through such prophets as Hanani and Azariah, the son of Oded, nor the worthy example of his ancestor, David, for whose sake the lamp was kept burning in the house of Judah. Yet even these do not account for a life so grandly zealous and true.

Coming to the throne at an early age, he reigned forty-one years, being contemporary with no less than seven kings of Israel—Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, Tibni and Ahab. His reign ushered in a great reformation, the first bold step of which was to brand with infamy the idolatry of the queen-mother by cutting down and completely demolishing the shameful idol she had set up. Then followed the partial breaking down of pillars and high places and the destroying of idols and idol-worship. But we are not to infer, from another account of this reformation, that it was by any means as thorough and complete as that which came years after in the reign of Hezekiah.

For ten years the people had rest under good King Asa. In the eleventh year, Zerah, the Ethiopian, came against him with an immense army, but by the divine interposition was defeated. After this signal victory over one of the great world-powers, Asa is met in the way by the prophet Azariah, who reminds him of the time when "Israel was without God, without a teaching prophet and without law," and describes that dark period as having been full of vexations and warfare, "nation against nation and city against city," with "no peace to him that went out nor to him that came in." Yet when in their distress they turned unto God and sought him, he heard them.

So impressed was Asa with the prophet's words that he at once urged his people to renew their covenant with God, and redoubled his efforts to rid the land of idolatry. When the people of Israel saw that God was with him they rallied in great numbers to his standard; and the fifteenth year of his reign was made memorable by a great gathering in Jerusalem, where, amidst the offering of immense sacrifices, the sound of trumpets and shoutings of the people, they entered into a covenant to seek Jehovah "with all their heart and with all their soul."

For two years before the death of Asa he seems to have been afflicted with gout in his feet and is criticised by the sacred writer for having sent to the physicians for help, rather than depending upon the Lord.

At his death he was laid in a tomb which he had built for himself and was buried with great honors amid the burning of many spices.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

(See Suggestions on Former Lesson.)

1. Why was it easier for the young prophet to withstand Jeroboam's invitation than that of the old prophet of Bethel?

2. Give instances in which sentiment or mere desire was manifest with reference to realized obligation but proved unavailing without obedience. Note

the two cases mentioned in former "Suggestions" and also the rich young ruler who came running and knelt at Jesus' feet.

3. Why are professors of the true religion able to do more harm to believers than are the avowedly wicked? By what are we to judge of false teachers? Matt. 7:15-17.

4. To what degree do you think the young prophet was blameworthy for going to eat and drink with the old prophet of Bethel?

5. Ministers preach on the excuses of

alien sinners for not confessing Christ. What are some of the excuses used by church members for not doing their duty? for not attending worship? not conducting home worship? not contributing to missions? for not letting their light shine in the community?

6. Although men do not set up graven images as idols, what are some of the forms of idolatry among us to-day? What is the essence of idolatry?

7. What did Jesus say as to the extreme blunder of leading believers astray?

HELPFUL QUESTIONS ON THE LESSONS WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. Although Azariah is not elsewhere mentioned what do you think of the one thing here related of him? 2 Chron. 15:1-2.

2. What three things are included in the second verse as spoken by the son of Oded to Asa and to the nation? Their key words are "with," "seek," and "for-sake." 2 Chron. 15:2.

3. For a long time Israel had lacked three great essentials. What were they? 2 Chron. 15:3. (See explanatory note on verses 3 and 4.)

4. What was the secret of their finding God whom they had lost? 2 Chron. 15:4.

5. What were some of the fruits of God's absence, that had caused distress? 2 Chron. 15:5, 6.

6. Did the appeal in verse 7th teach Asa that he was to be saved by "faith only" or by the Lord, whom through

faith he should faithfully serve? 2 Chron. 15:7.

7. What thorough reformation did Asa attempt after this message? 2 Chron. 15:8.

8. What encouraging accession to his kingdom did Asa enjoy at this time? 2 Chron. 15:9.

9. What is given as the reason why so many "fell to him out of Israel?" 2 Chron. 15:9.

10. What important assembly occurred in the fifteen year of Asa's reign? 2 Chron. 15:10.

11. They sacrificed, and what two things did they covenant to perform? 2 Chron. 15:12-13.

12. How did they show their enthusiasm and joy? 2 Chron. 15:14.

13. In what spirit had they sought the Lord? 2 Chron. 15:15.

14. What two happy consequences followed their consecration? 2 Chron. 15:15.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. The second verse of this chapter reminds one of what Jesus said about abiding in the vine. John 15:4-7.

2. In the cleansing of the temple Jesus manifested his own devotion to purity and obedience in worship.

3. In Christ the real character and heart of God are revealed. The spirit of Christ is to pray for one's enemies, to suffer long and be kind. The sword of Israel which slew in the name of Jehovah is, under the reign of Christ, to be

beaten into a plowshare and the spear into a pruning-hook.

4. But the warfare is not diminished; it is rather increased against error and sin under the reign of Christ. But we fight against inward enemies and seek to bring our very love and thoughts into subjection to Christ our King.

5. It is a very strong consolation to know that in the comparatively dark

periods of the Old Testament God was always ready to answer the sincere prayers of his children.

6. Just as multitudes from Israel came to Asa when they saw that God was with him, so the world is waiting to-day for the assurance that God is with the church. A praying, witnessing, sacrificing church—with Christ dominant in it is the magnet that will draw the hearts of men.

Lesson IV.

January 22.

OMRI AND AHAB LEAD ISRAEL INTO GREATER SIN.

1 Kings 16:15-33. (Print 1 Kings 16:23-33.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Righteousness exalteth a nation; but sin is a reproach to any people. Prov. 14:34.

Memory Verses—25, 30. **Suggested Reading**—Chapters 21 and 22. **Time**—From the Ascension of Omri, 936 B. C., to the close of Ahab's reign, 904 B. C. **Persons**—Omri, Ahab, Jezebel, Tibni, and Zimri. **Places**—Tirzah, Gibbethon, Samaria.

DAILY READINGS.

Jan. 16.... M—1 Kings 16:8-20 —Zimri Defeated by Omri.
 Jan. 17.... T—1 Kings 16:21-28 —The House of Omri Established.
 Jan. 18.... W—1 Kings 16:29-33 —Ahab's Corrupting Example.
 Jan. 19..... T—Mic. 6:1-16—The Statutes of Omri are Kept.
 Jan. 20.... F—2 Chron. 21:5-30—The Infection of Judah.
 Jan. 21.... S—2 Chron. 22:1-12 —Judah's Ruler Sprung from the House of Omri.
 Jan. 22... S—2 Kings 9:1-10—Propheying the Destruction of the House of Ahab.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Tirzah. One of the petty rulers whom Joshua conquered was the king of Tirzah (Josh. 12:24). The place is not again mentioned in the history of Israel until the time of Jeroboam (1 Kings 14:17). His residence was there, though earlier Shechem had been his capital (12:25).

Tirzah was the royal residence of Baasha and continued to have this honor until Omri made Samaria the capital. It was considered very beautiful, inasmuch that it was not unworthy of comparison with Jerusalem (Song of Sol. 6:4). Two sites contend for the honor of being identified with the ancient Tirzah. The one bearing the modern Arabic name of Terasir, is almost twelve miles north of Shechem, on the eastern extremity of Mt. Ephraim, where the highland begins to break down toward the Jordan. The other is Talluzah, a little east of north from Shechem and about four miles distant. The probabilities are greatly in favor of the latter place. (Robinson, McGarvey, G. A.

Smith.) Robinson describes the place thus: "The town is surrounded by immense groves of olive trees, planted on all the hills around; mostly young and thrifty trees. It lies high as approached from the east . . . toward the west one looks out over the high tableland spreading out north from Mt. Ebal. . . . The town is of some size and tolerably well built. We saw no remains of antiquity, except a few sepulchral excavations and some cisterns. . . . The place lies in a slightly and commanding position, though the change of royal residence to the still more beautiful and not distant Samaria would be very natural."

Gibbethon. This city was within the original territory of Dan (Josh. 19:44) and was one of the Levitical cities (Josh. 21:23). It was, therefore, on the border between the highland of Ephraim and the Maritime Plain. The exact spot has not been identified. A stubborn and long-drawn-out contest between Israel and the Philistines was waged for possession of it. Cf. 1 Kings 15:27; 16:15.

Samaria. This city was the one capital.

tal of the northern kingdom which vied with Jerusalem in strength and permanency. The capital when once fixed there was never to shift until the country was in utter ruin. Through all of the centuries until the days of the Herods it was the one important city of the north. It was a long-enduring monument to the sagacity of Omri. The reason for its importance is apparent. "It must, before the invention of gunpowder, have been almost impregnable." (Conдор.) "The head of Ephraim is Samaria," (Isaiah.) "Woe to them who . . . trust in the mountain of Samaria," (Amos.) It was besieged three times within the Bible period, and was never taken but once and then only after a siege of three years. It was situated six miles to the northwest of Shechem. "Here in a wide basin, formed by a bend of the vale and an incoming glen, rises a round, isolated hill over three hundred feet high. It was not already a city, but was probably, as it is to-day, covered with soil and arable to the top. Omri fortified it and called it Shomeron, Wartburg, the watch-tower. The name is obviously appropriate. Although the mountains surround and over-

look it on three sides, Samaria commands a great view to the west. The broad vale is visible for eight miles, then a long range of hills, and over them the sea. It is a position out of the way of most of the kingdom of which the center of gravity lay on the eastern slope; but it was wisely chosen by a dynasty whose strength was alliance with Phœnicia." (G. A. Smith.) The site of Samaria is now undergoing excavation under the direction of the Semitic department of Harvard University. In the last report of work done the following discovery is announced: "Of particular interest are the massive outlines and a portion of the wall of a still older structure which Dr. Riesner thinks is the palace of Omri and Ahab. The identification of these ruins as a Hebrew palace is accepted by Prof. Hugues Vincent of Jerusalem, a leading authority on Palestinian Archaeology, who has declared this to be the most instructive discovery yet made for the correct understanding of Israelite architecture. In a subterranean chamber beneath the palace were found several fragments of pottery with Hebrew inscription, but unfortunately no royal name has been recognized on them."

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

The scene of our lesson has shifted from the southern to the northern kingdom, and instead of studying a work of reformation, as was our task last week, we now study decay and moral deterioration. As Judah reformed Israel waxed worse and worse. Jeroboam's reign of twenty-two years was followed by one of two years by his son Nadab. He, like his father, was evil and he was too much of a weakling to hold together a kingdom which was founded upon the sword. The dynasty had its rise in rebellion, and after an existence of less than a quarter of a century it was swept away by a revolt headed by an officer of the army. Nadab was besieging the border town of Gibbethon in an attempt to wrest it

from the Philistines when he was slain by Baasha, of the tribe of Issachar, who then seized the throne. Ahijah's prediction was thus fulfilled (1 Kings 14:13-14.) The one ambition of Israel seems to have been the capture of Judah, and the only incident known of Baasha's reign was an effort to carry out this national ambition. He attempted to fortify Ramath, but was outgeneraled by Asa, and there was no other conspicuous event in his reign. It, too, like those of his predecessors, was evil, and the nation sinks lower toward decay and ruin. After his reign of twenty-four years his son, Elah, occupied the throne for two years, and just as Nadab fell at the hand of one of the officers of his

23 In the thirty and first year of Asa king of Judah began Omri to reign over Israel, and reigned twelve years: six years reigned he in Tirzah. 24 And he

army, so was the house of Baasha exterminated by Zimri, the captain of the half of Elah's chariots. This miserable fate could not have been unexpected. The times demanded a strong ruler, but Elah was only an effeminate debauchee. While his army was in camp he remained in the capital, and while deeply drinking in the house of his steward was slain by Zimri. Then followed the common eastern massacre of not only the males of Elah's house, but of those of his kinsmen and of his friends as well. But Zimri was only a petty officer and the army did not look with favor upon his ambition. It chose its commander-in-chief, Omri, king, and after crowning him in the camp, marched away from Gibbethon to besiege Tirzah. The capture of the capital was a short task, and after a reign of one week, the fate of Zimri was sealed. He determined, however, to cheat his enemies out of a portion of their triumph, and he did this by retiring into the palace and there he ended his own life in the flames of the building which had been set on fire by his own hand. But Omri was not to obtain the throne without a struggle. Another aspirant arose in the person of Tibni, of whom we know nothing other than that his father was named Ginath. Up to this time the changes of the rulers in Israel seem to have affected the families of the contending candidates for the throne only, but to this is now added the horrors of

civil strife which lasted for four years. Omri, at length, obtains the victory, and the death of Tibni, probably at the hand of Omri, as the Septuagint states, paved his way to the throne without further opposition. Exactly fifty years have passed since the division of the kingdom, but within that half century the ten northern tribes have had seven rulers, and two of the seven reigned forty-five out of the fifty. It was a period of anarchy and bloodshed. They have sown the wind and now they reap the whirlwind. Omri is a strong, vigorous ruler, and evolves order out of the chaos; but while he grasps the scepter with a firm hand, he, and especially his son Ahab, introduced into Israel a foreign worship and an immorality to which it had happily been a stranger heretofore. The worship of the Phœnician Baal and Ashtoreth became the recognized religion of the nation. The calf worship of Jeroboam was now a thing of the past, for Jehovah, either with or without the symbol, was no longer venerated. The prophets were persecuted as enemies of the nation (1 Kings 18:4). Edicts known as the "statutes of Omri" and favorable to idolatry were issued (Mic. 6:16). The worshipers of the God of Israel were persecuted even within his own land. The morals of the nation were as corrupt as the worship. Treachery, bloodshed, and impurity were the attendants of this foreign worship.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 23. In the thirty and first year of Asa: It was in this year that Tibnah died and Omri became sole ruler of Israel. Omri was chosen king by the army in the twenty-seventh year of Asa (vs. 15, 16). Twelve years: This in-

cludes the four years of civil war between Omri and Tibni, for Omri was chosen king by the army in the twenty-seventh year of Asa (vs. 15, 16), and died in the thirty-eight year. (v. 29). He reigned as sole king but eight years.

bought the hill Samaria of Shemer for two talents of silver; and he built on the hill, and called the name of the city which he built, after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill, Samaria. 25 And Omri did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, and dealt wickedly above all that were before him. 26 For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sins where-with he made Israel to sin, to provoke Jehovah, the God of Israel, to anger with

their vanities. 27 Now the rest of the acts of Omri which he did, and his might that he showed, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? 28 So Omri slept with his fathers, and was buried in Samaria; and Ahab his son reigned in his stead.

29 And in the thirty and eighth year of Asa king of Judah began Ahab the son of Omri to reign over Israel: and Ahab the son of Omri reigned over Israel in Samaria twenty and two years. 30 And

Six years reigned he in Tirzah: These probably include the four years of civil war. Hence, he located his capital in Samaria six years before his death.

24. **Samaria:** The Hebrew name is Shomeron, from the name of the owner, Shomer. We get our English form of the name directly from the Greek. For many years the Assyrians called this city in their inscriptions "the city [house] of Omri." **Two talents of silver:** According to Exodus 38:25, 26, 603,550 men, by paying a half-shekel each, collected a sum of 100 talents—1,775 shekels. Dividing the number of men by two gives us the number of shekels, which was 301,775. Hence every talent contained 3,000 shekels. It is impossible to determine with any accuracy the value of the shekel at this period. Exodus 30:13 states that the shekel contained twenty gerahs. These are supposed to be a kind of bean. Rabbis give the weight of a shekel as 320 barley grains. Seven and a half centuries after this the silver shekel, of which specimens are still in existence, was worth about sixty cents. At this rate the two talents of Omri would equal \$3,600.00. It must be remembered that money had greater purchasing power then than now.

25. **Dealt wickedly above all that were before him:** Omri's extreme wickedness consisted in his attitude toward

the worship. Micah speaks of certain statutes of Omri (6:16) which in his time were still kept. From verse 26 we infer that these had to do with the more rigid enforcement of the worship instituted by Jeroboam.

27. **His might:** As a warrior. The same word is used of Asa (15:23) and Baasha (16:5), but not of the other kings. This does not necessarily mean that Omri was victorious, for it seems that in his war with the kings of Damascus he was unsuccessful and had to grant the latter the privilege of conducting bazaars in Samaria (1 Kings 20:34). **Chronicles of the kings of Israel:** This is not our canonical book of Chronicles, for it does not give the history of the kings of Israel. It was the history of the kings of the northern tribes, which no longer exists.

28. **Buried in Samaria:** It should be noted that this was the first royal burial in the new capital.

29. **The history of Ahab is introduced** in verses 29-34; incidents of that reign are given in chapters 17 to 22, and the closing formula is to be found in 22:37-40. The history of his reign is given in fuller detail than that of any king since the reign of Solomon. This is due to the fact that the activity of Elijah fell within this period.

Ahab the son of Omri did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah above all that were before him. 31 And it came to pass, as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, that he took to wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and

served Baal, and worshipped him. 32 And he reared up an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he had built in Samaria. 33 And Ahab made the Asherah; and Ahab did yet more to provoke Jehovah, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him.

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30. Evil above all that were before him: Including even Omri (v. 25.) He became an out-and-out idolater, worshipping Baal and Ashtoreth (vs. 32, 33). See 1 Kings 21:25, 26. No king was remembered with greater horror than Ahab. He reached the lowest depths of wickedness. Later writers used him as a warning (1 Kings 21:3; 2 Chron. 21:13; Micah 6:16).

31. To walk in the sins of Jeroboam: He went beyond this into idolatry. Sin tends always to grow worse and worse. Ethbaal: Josephus quotes the Greek writer, Menander, in giving some details of this king's life. He was priest of the temple of Astarte in Tyre and killed the king to usurp the throne. His name means "Baal is with him." He was a thorough-going worshiper of Baal. Jezebel: No woman of history has made a deeper impression for wickedness than this woman. She was thoroughly masterful, so that Ahab, who seems to have been a fairly vigorous character, was a mere tool in her hand. Her life was a continuous succession of crimes. Took to wife: The marriage of Ahab and Jezebel must have taken place before his accession to the throne, for Azariah, king of Judah, who was a grandson of theirs (2 Kings 8:18-26), was twenty-two years old at the beginning of his reign, which was only about thirty-two years after Ahab's accession (v. 29, 1 Kings 22:51; 2 Kings 8:25). In other words, a grandson was

born to Ahab in the tenth year of his reign. Hence he must have been married at least ten years before he became king. This was near the beginning of Omri's reign. It shows that Omri was inclined toward idolatry. Baal: This was the male divinity of the Phenicians, Babylonians, and other Semitic peoples, the sun-god. The female goddess was Ashtoreth, Ashtar, Ishtar, or Astarte, as she was variously called. Baal was the generative and reproductive power in nature. His name means "lord."

32. Altar for Baal in the house of Baal: In this house he placed also a pillar, or image (2 Kings 3:2, 10:27). From the account of the slaughter of the priests of Baal, in 2 Kings 10:19-28, it may be inferred that the temple was of considerable size, for it was able to hold all of the Baal-worshippers.

33. Asherah: This word in the Authorized version of the English Bible is translated "grove." The "Asherah" or sacred pole was a survival of the old tree worship that is of the cult of sacred trees. . . . At first the Asherim were probably the stem of trees rudely chopped and stripped, afterward they were conventionalized into a shapely pole or mast." (McCurdy, in the New Schaff-Herzog.) Beside these wooden posts were sometimes placed stone pillars. They seem to have taken their origin from the earliest worship of stones. Later it seems that this word, Asherah,

became the name of a goddess, and is probably the same as Ashtoreth. When we are told that Ahab made the Ash-

erah, we are to understand that he set up a pole which, in some way, was connected with the worship of Baal.

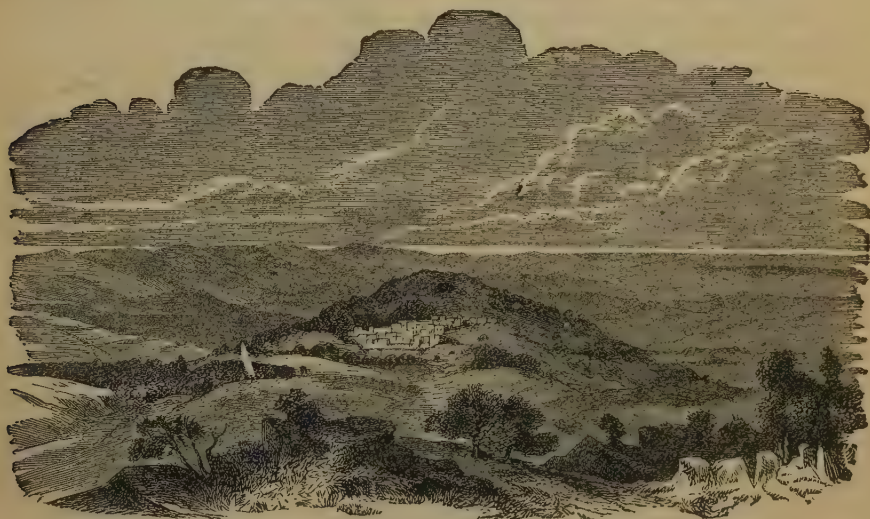
COMMENTS.

Background. There stands out from this remote time three persons, the outlines of whose lives and characters are bold and clear. They are the two kings, father and son, and the later's wife. Omri was a warrior, commander-in-chief of the army of an indulgent, enervated king. The king was slain by one whose ambition was greater than his prowess. In the fashion which became so common in the later years of the Roman Empire, the army chose a ruler for the nation, and naturally they chose the "mighty man of valor," who stood at the head of their columns. Omri was equal to the task placed upon him. He was compelled to contest his right to the throne, and, after four years of civil war, there was no one to question that he was to rule Israel. During this civil war the royal palace had been burned, and instead of erecting it on the same site, Omri chose a new one for his capital. His selection was an advantageous one and reflected credit on his wisdom. The nation prospered. There were some foreign wars which did not turn out advantageously in all cases, but he transformed a chaos into a stable government and instead of anarchy he wrought out order. Yet he was not a worshiper of Jehovah. The historian of his life, writing from the standpoint of a devoted believer in God, characterizes him as the worst of the kings who, up to this time, had occupied the throne of Israel. His attitude is shown in the fact that soon after he came to the throne he contracted with the king of Sidon a marriage between his son and the later's daughter. No worshiper of Jehovah could expect good from such an alliance. The name, the early occupa-

tion, the history of the king, and the character of the people over whom he ruled presaged evil for the true faith. This bride was of such a character as to fulfill all and more than was promised by his marriage. She was haughty, domineering, ambitious, would brook no restraint nor interference with her plans. She was brave as any man, and, even in old age, takes pains with her toilet in order to meet the man who she is sure will kill her. She meets him, too, without fear, but with scorn upon her lips. Coming as she does from an older and wealthier kingdom, she has a feeling for the people whom she rules which approaches almost to contempt. For their religion she had nothing but contempt; for that of her own people, she became the daughter of a priest, she has the profoundest devotion. In fact, she was a religious fanatic. She maintained, at her own expense, the numerous priests of this idolatrous worship (1 Kings 18:9), she was a bloody persecutor of the prophet of the God of her adopted land (1 Kings 18:13). No calamity nor manifestation of power can awe her nor lead her to doubt the truth of her cause (19:1-2.) She was truly an imperious, masterful, regal woman, and her husband was exactly that character which made her strength stand out uneclipsed. He was not decidedly weak in character. He was warlike when circumstances forced him to action, but he loved peace, not merely for the sake of peace, but because of the luxury and the indulgence which it made possible for him. He was fond of pomp and luxury. He was ambitious to rule, but he was attached to his kingly office because of the opportunity for indulgence which

it afforded him. He builded him a palace in Jezreel and surrounded it with gardens. One of the wonders wrought by his love of splendor was an ivory house (22:39). With this love of splendor there was a natural love of ease and inaction. He was reluctant to exercise his will, though he was intolerant of opposition. Thus he became the

assessing war between Judah and Israel. As a result, both are so weakened that they become at times the prey of hostile powers. Added to this was the horrors of civil war. Nor have they gained in having their burdens lightened. Ahab built costly buildings, and the prophet Amos, who described the condition of the northern kingdom at a time very



SITE OF SAMARIA, THE CAPITAL OF ISRAEL.

ready tool of his imperious queen. She really shaped the policy of the kingdom. Her religion and the morality (or rather the immorality) of her faith were the forces which controlled public and private action.

The Oppression of the People. The kingdom of Israel was founded on the discontent of the people. They had found Solomon's rule oppressive, and so they established a new government. But have they gained by the exchange? Certainly not. They have lost the happy times of peace. Solomon may have been exacting, but no war disturbed the quiet of their homes. Now, for more than half a century there has been constant, har-

assessing war between Judah and Israel. little later than this, pointed out the luxury and the splendor of the homes and life of the rich and the oppression and suffering of the poor. It did not come about by the act of Rehoboam, but it is nevertheless true that while Solomon's yoke was heavy, that which they now bear is decidedly heavier.

Wickedness increases. The one clear, outstanding truth of this lesson is that the course of a wicked man is worse and worse. "The tumult of those that rise up against thee ascendeth continually" (Ps. 74:23). Truly wickedness was, as the rabbis said in the beginning, like a spider's web, but in the end it is like a cart-rope. Jeroboam com-

menced his career with a slight deflection from the path marked out by God. He probably thought of it as little more than a change in the place and forms of worship. "But a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump." It was the thin, entering wedge which is in time to split these ten tribes entirely away from God. It is a significant fact that in all the long line of kings which for more than two and a half centuries ruled the northern kingdom, there is not one of whom it is said that he did well. All of this was due to Jeroboam's sin. His successors walked in his steps, but they regard it as a light thing to walk merely in his steps. They all go farther until they come to the dark wickedness of Jezebel and Ahab.

Licentiousness the Essence of the Baal Worship. The worship of Baal was the deification of the beneficence of nature. Whatever may be the true explanation of the origin of this worship, it is certain that its primary significance, as its name indicates, is power. It is the power especially which reproduces and quickens in nature. It was natural for this to pass into licentiousness, and it has closely connected with it the worship of Astarte, which we well know was saturated with impurity. The prophets denounce this worship because it was primarily, from the viewpoint of Jehovah, unfaithfulness to the relation between him and his people, which they

delighted to liken to the marriage bond; and in the second place because it fostered social impurity. The effect of this may be readily estimated. The following picture does not overdraw the result. "It is hard to realize the hurtful perversion of conscience, the weakening of moral convictions, and the clouding of true reverence, which such attacks on the sanctities of religion must have involved; or how deeply the people must have been corrupted by royal favors shown to a gross and sensual idolatry. Nor could it be hoped that a power which thus trampled on all that was sacred, would hesitate to outrage the lower rights of popular liberty. Everything tended to bring about a deadly struggle against a monarchy, which, though established to protect the hereditary religion and privileges of the nation, had been metamorphosed into their imperious and deadly foe. The multitude, led away by royal example, might yield to the ruling passion, but noble hearts would turn so much the more against the house of Omri. The magnitude of the interest at stake would rouse the prophets especially to the intensest resistance. Events were hurrying to a crisis, which, as in all similar decisive moments of history, must bring forward some strong personality to embody the inarticulate feeling of the multitude and be its champion. The advent of Elijah was near at hand." (Geikie.)

THE LESSON STORY.

During good king Asa's reign of forty-one years in Judah we see the wicked kings of Israel come and go in quick succession. With the exception of Baasha, each was conspicuous for the brevity of his reign. Nadab, the son of Jeroboam, "doing that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah," and slain by Baasha, in two years; Elah, reigning for an equally brief period, drinking himself drunk in

the house of his steward in Tirzah and dying at the hands of Zimri, the captain of half his chariots; Zimri, in turn, wading through blood to seize the throne and besieged in Tirzah, burning himself to death in the king's house, after reigning but seven days; the contested reign of Tibni and Omri, together covering only a period of twelve years, all give startling emphasis to the words of the

Psalmist: "The wicked shall not live out half his days." The government of the ten tribes at this time was a military monarchy. The almost incessant war kept up against Judah for nearly half a century required a large army, and "kings were made and unmade at the caprice of the soldiery, or under the promptings of ambitious aspirants among their own leaders."

It was amid such scenes of civil conflict that, after four years, Tibni was defeated and Omri, "captain of the host," with a stronger military following, succeeded to the throne. Like Jeroboam, Omri was a builder. The former capital, Tirzah, having been seriously damaged in the siege, he decided to found another royal city, and chose for its site the mountain of Samaria, six miles northwest of Shechem.

The situation was ideal, combining strength, beauty and fertility. "It stood in the midst of a circle of hills, commanding a view of its streets and slopes, itself the crown and glory of the scene." It was the only important city of Palestine erected by the kings, all others having been "consecrated by patriarchal tradition or previous possession," and, although its founder gave to it the name of Samaria, yet in Assyrian inscriptions, it bears the name of "The House or Palace of Omri."

The city soon became, under the rule of an evil king, the seat of luxury, vice and oppression. While from a worldly point of view he may have been thought a wise ruler, yet through his alliance with Ethbaal, king of Tyre, culminating in the marriage of his son, Ahab, to Jezebel, the king's daughter, he opened

the way for the worship of Baal; in comparison with which the former calf worship at Bethel and Dan seems to have been the mildest idolatry, it being an attempt to worship God under symbols, while this was the most corrupt ever known in Israel.

So the record of the king is that "he wrought evil in the eyes of the Lord and did worse than all that went before him." After a reign of twelve years Omri died and was buried in the city he had founded, but the evil he had wrought was not "interred with his bones." Its terrible effects were fully realized in the reign of his son Ahab.

Unusual space is given to the deeds of this wicked king and his desperately wicked wife. The names of Ahab and Jezebel have been linked through all succeeding ages as the very synonyms of iniquity.

Ahab's evil tendencies were fearfully accelerated by his marriage, which became an unmitigated curse to him and the nation. Among the evils that followed in the train of this idolatrous woman was the setting up of an immense temple to Baal in Samaria, with four hundred and fifty priests, at which shrine Ahab attended the worship in state, and the erection of another one to Asherah at Jezreel with four hundred ministering priests.

In order to the complete establishing of this extremely gross idolatry, a terrible war of extermination was waged against the prophets of Jehovah. Thus did Ahab, with the aid of Jezebel, "do yet more to provoke the Lord to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him."

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. To what extent were Asa's heredity and environment favorable or unfavorable to a good reign? (See last Lesson Story.)

2. Would Asa have, or not have,

wrought greater reforms if public sentiment had been more favorable? (Judge from what you know of him and his people.)

3. What conspicuous characteristic of

Asa became the chief means of his success? 2 Chron. 13:18; 14:11; 15:8.

4. Name some of the excellent fruits of Asa's faith, or works that grew out of it. His was not a dead faith.

5. Why was the 107th psalm mentioned in Practical Suggestions in the former lesson?

6. God requires obedience at the hands of men according to what very important principle, which if remembered

ought to make us more humble and more charitable in judging others? John 15:22; 2 Cor. 8:12; and Jas. 4:17.

7. What duty and assurance were contained in the Golden Text of Lesson No. 3?

8. What encouraging fact for us is suggested by 2 Chron. 15:15?

9. In what had Asa done foolishly for which the seer Hanani reproved him? 2 Chron. 16:1-9. (Important in estimating his character.)

HELPFUL QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. What king reigned only one week in the new capital of Israel? 1 Kings 16:15.

2. Who succeeded him and where and by whom was he made king? 1 Kings 16:16.

3. How did Zimri die and what were his sins? 1 Kings 16:17, 18.

4. How long did Omri reign in Israel and in what two capitals? 1 Kings 16:23, 24.

5. What brief sentence indicates the bad character of Omri? 1 Kings 16:25.

6. What injurious evils of idolatry—that made God angry—are mentioned in the last words of 1 Kings 16:26?

7. What do you understand particularly by Omri's walking in the way of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat? 1 Kings 16:26.

8. What next wicked king in Samaria, and how long did he reign? 1 Kings 16:29.

9. In what respect did he excel his father? 1 Kings 16:30; compare v. 35.

10. Name two of his most wicked and disastrous acts? 1 Kings 16:31.

11. What three additional steps did Ahab take that provoked God's anger? 1 Kings 16:32, 33.

12. What prophecy was fulfilled at this time? 1 Kings 16:34 and Josh. 6:26.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. Material prosperity and spiritual decay may co-exist for a season, but ultimately spiritual declension will lead to material ruin. Examples: Greece, Rome, Jerusalem. Matt. 23:37; 24:2.

2. Note the same principle in individual, as well as national, life in the teaching of both Old and New Testaments. Matt. 7:33; 1 Tim. 4:8. Job enunciated the principle when he said: "The righteous shall hold on his way, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger." Job 17:9. Another beautiful testimony to this prosperity is found in Psalm 37:1-11.

3. As in the New Testament righteous-

ness is seen to exalt the church and the individual, so in the Old Testament, particularly, it is obvious that it exalts a nation. See Golden Text.

4. Many kings both in Israel and Judah permitted great hospitality to idolatry. Jesus, on the other hand, would exclude it narrowly and utterly even from the thoughts. Luke 14:26; Jas. 4:4, and 1 John 5:21.

5. One of the commonest sins of the day—a sin very often disregarded in the church—is said to be idolatry. What is it? Col. 3:5.

6. Note. If Christ be not deity it is idolatry to worship him. If he were not

divine his encouragement to his disciples to adore him would have been blasphemy. If he had not been what he claimed to be, his enemies would have been justifiable in rejecting him.

7. Jezebel is mentioned in the Book of Revelation as symbolical of feminine seduction and impurity. Those under her spell were warned of great tribulation awaiting them except they should repent; and all the churches should know

that the Son of God searcheth the reins and trieth the hearts.

8. The New Testament revelation gives greater emphasis to purity of heart than the Old—its greatest emphasis being in Christ himself. The New would plant Christian principles, a knowledge of Christ with love for, and hope in, him to safeguard against all evil and to inspire the heart to overcome all sin and thus prepare for heaven.

Lesson V.

January 29.

JEHOSHAPHAT'S GOOD REIGN IN JUDAH.

2 Chron. 17:1-13. (Print 17:1-13.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you. Matt. 6:33.

Memory Verses—3 and 4. **Suggested Reading**—Chapters 17 to 20. **Time**—From the accession of Jehoshaphat in 921 B. C., to his death in 897 B. C. The teaching mission was in 919 B. C. **Persons**—Jehoshaphat, many princes, Levites and priests. **Places**—Land of Judah, cities of Ephraim.

DAILY READINGS.

Jan. 23....M—2 Chron. 17:1-19 —Jehoshaphat's Good Reign in Judah.
 Jan. 24....T—1 Kings 22:1-12—The false Prophecy of Zedekiah.
 Jan. 25....W—1 Kings 22:13-28—The True Prophecy of Micaiah.
 Jan. 26....F—1 Kings 22:29-40 —The Prophecy Fulfilled in Ahab.
 Jan. 27....F—2 Chron. 19:1-11 —Jehoshaphat's Rebuke by Jehu, the Seer.
 Jan. 28....S—2 Chron. 20:1-30 —Jehoshaphat's Victory through Song.
 Jan. 29....S—1 Kings 22:41-50 —Splendid Career of a Godly King.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Judah. The territory over which Jehoshaphat ruled was practically that ruled by Asa (See Geographical Notes on lesson for January 15.) Asa had been able to extend the boundary of his kingdom somewhat to the north by the capture of certain cities of Ephraim (v. 2). These remained a part of the kingdom of Jehoshaphat. He seems also to have been successful in wars of conquest and obtained a suzerainty over Edom (1 Kings 22:47). The Philistines and the Arabians also paid him tribute (v. 11), which shows that his arms had been victorious over them. With reference to the Philistines, the language expressly limits the

collection of tribute from *some* and not from all. This shows that he had not attached all of the Maritime Plain to his kingdom. The Arabians here referred to were the Nomad tribes to the south and southeast of Judah. The tribute was probably paid partly in the nature of quit-money to reward him for not harassing them, just as David asked a present from Nabal because his young men had not molested the latter's flocks (1 Sam. 25:28), and partly to secure his protection against powerful neighbors. Whatever may be the reason for payment it bears witness to Jehoshaphat's reputation as a powerful ruler.

HISTORICAL CONNECTIONS.

Asa's long reign of forty-one years terminated in two years of lingering illness in which his affliction was a disease of the feet. He was buried in a new grave, distinct from the royal tombs, and his body was laid to its last rest with elaborate ceremonials. He was succeeded by his son, Jehoshaphat, who at the time of his accession was thirty-five years of age

(1 Kings 22:42). He reigned for a quarter of a century. He was an able king and a good one. He reaped the benefits of his father's long and peaceful reign in finding his kingdom at peace and in prosperity. He made the most of this by spreading afar the benefits of his rule and commerce. He is the first king of Judah who imitates Solomon in commer-

cial enterprise. We hear again of ships of Tarshish, of the land of Ophir, of search for gold, and of commercial alliances with other kings (1 Kings 22:47). One marked feature of his reign was the establishment of peace between Judah and Israel for the first time. From the time of the disruption there had been continuous war between the two kingdoms until far down in the reign of Asa at least (1 Kings 14:30; 15:7-16). If there was cessation of hostilities during the last part of Asa's reign it was due in part to the fact that Omri and Ahab were engaged in other enterprises than wars with their southern neighbors. During the reign of Jehoshaphat, however, a peace began which was more than an armed neutrality. It was based upon negotiations, a recognition of their common interests and a treaty of alliance (1 Kings 22:44). This treaty was sealed by the marriage of the son of Jehoshaphat with the daughter of Ahab (2 Kings 8:18; 26-27). From this alliance no good eventually came for the face of all Jezebel's seed was set strongly against the worship of Jehovah, but as a present policy between the two kingdoms it was a wise one for both. Jehoshaphat's reign was marked by the continuation of the same faithfulness to Jehovah which had characterized the reign of Asa. "He walked in all the ways of Asa, his father; he turned not aside from it, doing that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah." (1 Kings 22:43.) There still existed a number of places in Judah where there were altars consecrated to the service of Jehovah, in violation of the sanctity of Jerusalem and of the Deuteronomic law of one altar. These high places Jehoshaphat did not disturb (1 Kings 22:43), as his father likewise had left them unmolested (15:14). Here and there over the land there remained still some idolatrous high places and some Asherim foul with lust and blood, but these Jehoshaphat destroyed. The religious peace and pur-

ity of his reign stand in striking contrast to the persecution and idolatry which at the same time were so conspicuous in the sister kingdom of Israel.

Chronicles. This lesson is taken from the book of 2 Chronicles. For a discussion of the nature of this book, see the introduction to the lesson for January the 15th. The account of the reign of Jehoshaphat in Chronicles is much longer than the record given by Kings. There is some mention of him in the history of Ahab's reign, for they became allies. Other than this the account of Jehoshaphat's reign to be found in Kings is confined to 1 Kings 22:41-50. After stating briefly the details of his personal life and the moral and religious character of his rule, it summarizes the leading political and commercial events of his reign. Most of these, Chronicles mentions but merely, to point out the moral and religious worth of the act or to censure Jehoshaphat for a temporary lapse from virtue. In other words the chronicler gives us the history of Jehoshaphat with a didactic purpose. In addition to the 17th and 18th chapters, the former of which contains our lesson, and the latter a repetition of what is also in 1 Kings 22, the chronicler tells of a rebuke administered to Jehoshaphat by the prophet Jehu for his alliance with Ahab (19:1-3); of judges which he appointed for Judah and solemnly charged (19:4-11); and of an invasion of Judah by a host of the Ammonites and of the divine deliverance which was granted him from this impending evil. In each case the value of the incident as the chronicler sees it, is to be found in its usefulness as an example for imitation or warning. Many critics are prone to regard Chronicles as of but little value historically, but in this case our knowledge of the reign of Jehoshaphat would be much more meager if we did not possess this book; and the events of his reign which are told in it are as probable as those narrated in Kings.

1 And Jehoshaphat his son reigned in his stead, and strengthened himself against Israel. 2 And he placed forces in all the fortified cities of Judah, and set garrisons in the land of Judah, and in the cities of Ephraim, which Asa his father had taken. 3 And Jehovah was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the first ways of his father David, and sought not unto the Baalim, but sought

to the God of his father, and walked in his commandments, and not after the doings of Israel. 5 Therefore Jehovah established the kingdom in his hand; and all Judah brought to Jehoshaphat tribute; and he had riches and honor in abundance. 6 And his heart was lifted up in the ways of Jehovah: and furthermore he took away the high places and the Asherim out of Judah.

EXPLANATORY.

1. **Jehoshaphat:** His name means "whom Jehovah pleads for." It is indicative of Asa's character and his hope for his son. **Strengthened himself against Israel:** Ahab has been reigning four years (1 Kings 22:41). His alliance with the Sidonians, his idolatry, and his strength would lead Jehoshaphat to protect himself against him. Other circumstances brought the two quickly into family alliance (18:1; 1 Kings 22:2).

2. **Fortified cities of Judah:** Rehoboam had fortified many places in Judah. For a list of these see 2 Chron. 11:5-10. In each of these Jehoshaphat placed a small part of his army. **Garrisons:** Probably refers to the officer, and should be translated "governors." They are at least something different from the forces. **Cities of Ephraim:** These are mentioned again in 15:8.

3. **The first ways of his father (David):** The word David is omitted from the early versions and from many manuscripts of the Hebrew. It probably does not belong to the correct text. If it is omitted, the reference would be to his father Asa, whose first ways were more faithful to Jehovah than his later ones. **Baalim:** The plural of Baal. The Hebrew forms the plural of masculine words by adding "im." The reference here is probably to the many forms of Baal, for every important town or place would have its own Baal. Cf. Jud. 8:33; 11:33.

(Baal-Berith); 2 Kings 1:2 (Baal-Zebub); Ps. 106:28 (Baal-Peor). **The doings of Israel:** This country was fast going into idolatry. The worship of the calves was never attractive to the king of Judah, for it was antagonistic to the nation; but the worship of Baal was. Hence this refers to idolatry.

5. **Jehovah established the kingdom:** He ruled in peace and prosperity, which was proof of divine approval. **Tribute:** The Authorized Version translates this "presents." They were, in form at least, voluntary; but custom dictated the giving of them, and the failure to do so would be construed as disloyalty. Hence they were practically tributes. It will be recalled that certain persons expressed their disapproval of Saul by refusing to bring him presents (1 Sam. 10:27).

6. **His heart was lifted up:** This expression is used here in a good sense, though it oftener has a bad meaning. The meaning is that given in the Authorized Version. "He took courage," etc. **High places:** Sites of heathen altars and worship. **Asherim:** Plural of Asherah. See Baalim (v. 3). They were the images or wooden pillars used in the idolatrous worship.

7. **Sent his princes:** The Hebrew is literally, "He sent to his princes to teach," that is, he instructed his princes to see that the instruction was given. The teaching was to be done by the priests and Levites. **Ben-hail, etc.:** Nothing

10 And the fear of Jehovah fell upon all the kingdoms of the lands that were round about Judah, so that they made no war against Jehoshaphat. 11 And some of the Philistines brought Jehoshaphat presents, and silver for tribute; the Arabians also brought him flocks, seven thousand and seven hundred rams, and

seven thousand and seven hundred he-goats. 12 And Jehoshaphat waxed great exceedingly; and he built in Judah castles and cities of store. 13 And he had many works in the cities of Judah; and men of war, mighty men of valor, in Jerusalem.

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more is known of these five princes.

8. Nine Levites and two priests. It was the duty of both of these classes to teach. See 2 Chron. 15:3; 35:3. These persons are otherwise unknown.

9. The book of the law of Jehovah: By this is meant our Pentateuch. Copies were scarce, and one of the duties of the instructors would be to read the law.

10. The fear of Jehovah: See the margin, "a terror from Jehovah." It does not mean that these nations served Jehovah, but that Jehoshaphat's success and power produced such awe in their minds that they were afraid to oppose him. Like every other manifestation of power, this was from Jehovah.

11. Some of the Philistines: This people was thoroughly subjected during the reign of David (2 Sam. 5:25; 8:1, 12). No war for their independence has been mentioned since, but the fact that some only and not all are mentioned as paying

tribute shows that they had rebelled. They also carried on war with Israel (1 Kings 15:27). Jehoshaphat restored his authority over part of the territory. Presents: A euphemism for tribute or taxes. The oriental mind is fond of mild names for harsh facts. Silver for tribute: The Hebrew is literally "silver of burden." It probably means "much silver," rather than silver for tribute. Arabians: The nomads living to the south and south-east of Judah. They paid their tribute in the current wealth which they possessed. Mesha, king of Moab, paid Ahab in flocks and wool (2 Kings 3:4).

12. Castles: Fortresses, strongholds. Cities of store: Strongholds where supplies were stored.

13. Many works: This means that he spent much labor on the cities of Judah, probably in strengthening their defenses. Men of war . . . in Jerusalem: Other cities were fortified, but the army was maintained in Jerusalem.

COMMENTS.

Jehoshaphat, a Man of Caution. (vs. 11-13.) Jehoshaphat was a man that provided protection for his country. In this he was wise. We may not accept fully the doctrine advocated by so many politicians, that a strong army and a well-equipped navy are the best guarantee of peace, yet Jehoshaphat did wisely in preparing his nation for a possible conflict. He was surrounded by many nations. No international law nor well-developed public opinion held the

ambitious in check, as is the case in modern nations. Any one of these might at any time start on a career of conquest. But especially to be feared was the sister kingdom to the north. It was Judah's hereditary foe. For more than threescore years there had been no cessation of hostilities between the two. Whenever two peoples or two persons that are bound together by ties of kinship and common interest fall, the hatred and jealousy is more intense.

Judah had every reason to fear Israel, but especially since Ahab now sat on the throne. He was strong, he was young, he was antagonizing the religion for which Judah stood. Ordinary prudence would have prompted Jehoshaphat to protect himself against such a foe. But he seems to have been an extraordinarily cautious man. He had two foreign wars and there is no mention of the fact that his neighbors were hostilely disposed, yet he brought his kingdom to a high state of military efficiency. The land was garrisoned (v. 2). Castles and store-houses were erected (v. 12) and his army was well organized (vs. 14-19).

The Protection of Righteousness. (v. 1.) The Golden Text of this lesson tells us that righteousness exalts a nation. No better example of this truth can be found than Judah during the reign of Jehoshaphat. When he came to the throne he was the fourth king in a direct line to rule over Judah. Ahab was the eighth ruler that Israel had possessed within the same period, and they were from five families or dynasties. There is but one explanation of this and that is the superior morals of the kings and people in Judah. Jehoshaphat himself was personally pure and zealous for Jehovah. He was not enticed by the idolatry of some of his own people; the splendor and the attractiveness of the worship maintained by Ahab's court did not appeal to him. Instead, he sought the God of his fathers and walked in his commandments. Therefore Jehovah established the kingdom in his hand. Tribute, wealth and honor from home and abroad became the possession of Jehoshaphat as a consequence. This was a surer protection for his land than fortresses and armies.

Stability Through His Ancestors. (v. 3.) Two reasons are given for God's

favor shown to Jehoshaphat. One was personal; he himself sought the way of Jehovah. The other was because of his ancestors. Either was sufficient to guard the integrity of the nation for a time, but when both are combined no power can shake the throne. Not all the kings of Judah were good men. Some were idolatrous, as devoted to their idol gods as Ahab was to his. Manasseh, who stained Jerusalem with human sacrifice, was of David's line, yet the city was spared for David's sake. There is a solidarity in nations and a transmitted integrity which even God honors. David was not only a name which his descendants might recall with pride, but was also a support for the throne and the nation long after his name was only a memory. This is to be explained by God's purpose in Judah. This nation was to transmit God's name and cause to posterity. It was to be his light shining in the gloom of sin and idolatry. A united nation and a royal family which had about it the sanctity of antiquity and descent from a great hero of the past could best accomplish this purpose. David's name was closely associated with the worship of Jehovah. For David's line to have failed at any point before the nation became thoroughly identified with this worship would have pushed that goal many generations into the future. The unbroken line of David's descendants who ruled in Jerusalem was one of the reasons why the people of Judah became thorough-going worshipers of Jehovah. And from the point of view of divine providence, this continuous Davidic line was one of God's agencies in bringing about his purposes.

A People for Jehovah. (vs. 7-9.) Jehoshaphat, by his system of instruction, helped toward the same end. Judah is to be unique in that it alone is to be the people of Jehovah. Their relation-

ship is based upon the law. The knowledge of the law upon the part of the people is a condition upon which this relationship is to be maintained. Books were rare. Few of the people could read. The law provided two orders, whose duty it was to instruct the people, but much of the time this duty was neglected. Jehoshaphat employed the machinery of his government to aid and superintend this instruction. A dark period for Judah followed the reign of Jehoshaphat. Idolatry and anarchy succeeded almost in destroying the Davidic line and the true worship. The instruction given by the priests and Levites during this time does much to fortify them for this struggle. This instruction was the forerunner of the rabbinical schools of later times, which gave so thorough instruction in the law. "Eighty years before Christ, schools flourished throughout the length and breadth of the land, education had been made compulsory" (Deutsch). We have here, also, one of the religious antecedents of that

instruction, which is now given in our modern Bible schools.

His Youth Better Than his Old Age.

The moral influence of Jehoshaphat was good, both upon his own nation and upon surrounding countries. He must be reckoned as one of the strong and religious rulers of the nation. He never departed from the conduct which is described in this lesson. It is probable that more credit should be given him, when we take note of the strong influences for idolatry which were exerted by Ahab and his court. Yet it must be confessed that the flower loses somewhat of its bloom. The freshness of his zeal and the intense loyalty of his devotion withers somewhat toward old age. Jehoshaphat made one mistake. He entered into alliance with Ahab and married his son to the latter's daughter. The result was the dark day in Judah's history, in which Athaliah was the heroine. Probably the alliance was justifiable from the point of view of statecraft, but its influence upon morals and religion was deplorable.

THE LESSON STORY.

We are glad to turn from the wicked court of Israel to study the life of one of Judah's wisest and best kings.

Jehoshaphat, the son of Asa and Azubah, came to the throne at the age of thirty-five and reigned for a quarter of a century, walking "in all the ways of Asa his father." The name Jehoshaphat, though not euphonious, has a happy significance, meaning "whom Jehovah pleads for," and in it seems to be reflected the devout and prayerful spirit of his father Asa. It is worthy of mention, also, that while most of Judah's kings, from David down, were polygamists, this king had the blessing of coming into the world under holier conditions, his father having had but one wife.

The righteous and prosperous admin-

istration of Judah's kings presents a sharp contrast to the idolatrous and ruinous policy of his contemporaries, Ahab and Jezebel, and shows the wisdom, on the one hand, of "seeking first the kingdom of God and his righteousness" and, on the other, the utter folly of rejecting it.

On coming to his throne Jehoshaphat began at once to strengthen his kingdom by fortifying all the cities in Judah and then in Israel, which his father had taken, and, while doing so, he did not neglect to fortify himself against the evil influences by which he was surrounded, and this he did by seeking the Lord of his father and in walking "in his commandments and not after the doings of Israel." Thus was he prospered, his throne being established "with

riches and honor in abundance," and, not only so, but going from strength to strength, finding more and more delight in the service of God, he took away many of the high places and the idols out of Judah.

in the third year of his reign was undertaken a work of great value, the sending of priests and Levites throughout all the land to teach the people out of the book of the law. How wonderful and far-reaching must have been the influence of God's word, thus taught, upon the mind and conscience of the nation!

As a result of the God-fearing rule of Jehoshaphat "the fear of Jehovah fell upon the kingdoms round about," and peace, such as had not hitherto been known in all its history, rested, like a benediction, upon the house of Judah. To the blessing of peace was added that of material wealth, for not only did "all Judah," but also the Philistines and Arabians pay tribute to the king.

"Another sign of his prosperity may be seen in the castles and store-houses which he built in Judah and in his great standing army in Jerusalem, estimated to have numbered 1,160,000 men.

His wisdom was shown (1) in the thorough military organization of his

kingdom; (2) in the fortifying of the cities of Judah and those taken by his father in Israel; (3) in the establishing of a system of religious instruction among the people; (4) in the destruction of idolatry; but (5) most of all in his own personal devotion to the King of kings, through which, having gained the divine favor, "his kingdom was established in his hand."

It would be more pleasing to tell of nothing but the good deeds of this king. But in faithfulness the historian has recorded against him at least one grievous blunder. In spite of the awful consequences of marriage with heathen nations, as seen in the case of Ahab and Jezebel, he seems to have committed a willful sin in allowing his son, Jehoram, to marry Athaliah, the daughter of the heathen Jezebel.

For this alliance, entered into for policy's sake, and not in the fear of God, and resulting in so much evil to Judah, the king was sharply rebuked by Jehu, the prophet.

Yet, considering the times in which Jehoshaphat lived, and his wicked surroundings, we can but wonder at the purity of his life. "In later days he alone was counted worthy to rank with Hezekiah and Josiah among the most pious rulers" of the house of David.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What city did Omri build? 1 Kings 16:24.

2. What were the names of the first eight kings of Israel? (1) 1 Kings 12:20; (2) 1 Kings 15:25; (3) 1 Kings 15:33; (4) 1 Kings 16:6; (5) 1 Kings 16:15; (6) 1 Kings 16:21; (7) 1 Kings 16:23; (8) 1 Kings 16:29.

3. In what particular respect were all of these kings alike?

4. Why was Ahab's sin so great in marrying Jezebel?

5. What does his marriage suggest with reference to religion in relation to the marriage relation?

6. Name some of the evils that arose out of Ahab's marriage? (See Lesson Story.)

7. What striking contrast obtained at this period between Judah and Israel?

HELPFUL QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLICAL ANSWERS.

1. What two advantages did Jehoshaphat have over Asa in coming to the throne? (See Preliminary Question one of last lesson.)

2. What is the first thing the new king did after he began to reign? 2 Chron. 17:1.

3. What places did he strengthen? 2 Chron. 17:2.

4. What was the best asset and security to Jehoshaphat? 2 Chron. 17:3.

5. In whose "first ways" did he walk and what did he refuse? 2 Chron. 17:3, 4. (See Expl. v. 3.)

6. Why did God establish the kingdom in his hand? 2 Chron. 17:4, 5.

7. What is meant when it is said, "his

heart was lifted up"? 2 Chron. 17:6. (See Expl. v. 6.)

8. What does the long and unattractive name Jehoshaphat mean? (See Expl., v. 1.)

9. What dangers did he remove out of Judah? 2 Chron. 17:6.

10. What new thing did the king inaugurate in Judah? 2 Chron. 17:7-9.

11. How many princes and how many Levites? 2 Chron. 17:7-9.

12. How many priests, also—and their names? 2 Chron. 17:8.

13. Why did surrounding nations not war against the king? 2 Chron. 17:10.

14. What two peoples brought gifts to the king? 2 Chron. 17:11.

15. What is said of his greatness and men of war? 2 Chron. 17:12, 13.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. Every one has foes within and without, but which are the more dangerous?

2. Is it right to have a standing army and to lock your doors at night?

3. If a man's ways please the Lord what will he do for him? Prov. 16:7.

4. Are we to infer that if God loves us he will spare us from pain? Heb. 12:6; Acts 9:16; Rom. 8:17.

5. What application to this lesson has the Golden Text? Matt. 6:31.

6. What is said of the character of our King in Heb. 1:9?

7. What lesson have we learned as to the value of teaching the Scriptures? Matt. 28:20.

8. What is said of the bringing of gifts to the Messiah in Isa. 60:1-9?

9. Through all these years the name of the good king Jehoshaphat has been respected because he did right, while Ahab's name has been abhorred. The greatest name in history is mentioned in Phil. 2:9, 10.

10. Jehoshaphat had an ugly name, as translated into English, but he made it beautiful by his good conduct.

11. We believe the king, who lived so long ago, is now living, and rejoice that he denied himself in Judah sought to please Jehovah and benefit the people.

12. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our instruction." Rom. 15:4.

Lesson VI.

February 5.

ELIJAH THE PROPHET APPEARS IN ISRAEL.

1 Kings 17. (Print 1 Kings 17:1-16.)

GOLDEN TEXT—They that seek Jehovah shall not want any good thing. Ps. 34:10.

Memory Verses—14-16. **Time**—During the reign of Ahab, from 925 to 904 B. C. Probably about 915 B. C. **Persons**—Elijah, Ahab, widow of Zarephath. **Places**—Tishbe, Gilead, the Brook Onereth, Zarephath.

DAILY READINGS.

Jan. 30....M—1 Kings 17:1-7—The Prophet's Note of Defiance.

Jan. 31....T—1 Kings 17:8-16—The Undiminished Meal and Cruse of Oil.

Feb. 1....W—1 Kings 17:17-24—The Widow's Son Restored.

Feb. 2....T—Ps. 37:1-27—The Righteous Upheld in Famine.

Feb. 3....F—Matt. 10:16-42.—Receiving a Prophet's Reward.

Feb. 4....S—Luke 4:16-30—Elijah Sent Only to Zarephath.

Feb. 5....S—James 5:1-20—Elijah a Man of Like Passions with Ourselves.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

The Tishbite. The prophet is called the Tishbite without any explanation here or elsewhere as to the meaning of the word. Various explanations have been suggested. The most probable one is that he was called by this name from his native town, Tishbe. No such place is mentioned anywhere in the Bible, but in one of the books of the Apocrypha there is mention of such a place in Galilee (Tobit 1:2). This agrees with the further description of Elijah. He came to Samaria from Gilead, but he was not a native of this region (v. 1). It seems probable, therefore, that Elijah was born in Galilee, in the town of Tishbe, and removed from there to Gilead where he sojourned.

Gilead. This region was that portion of the trans-Jordanic possession of Israel which lies north of the high tableland of Moab and south of the river Yarmuk. It is halved by the river Jabok. It was broken country and the people were half Nomads. Their ideals were of the past. Elijah himself is a figure of antique simplicity. His ideals

were in accord with the people from whom he came. They had more affinity with the wilderness life of the age of Moses and were far removed from the Sidonian influences which prevailed in the court of Ahab.

Brook Cherith. The location of this hiding-place of the prophet depends upon the meaning of the phrase "before the Jordan" (v. 3). Some scholars insist that this must mean "east of the Jordan," and they seek for the location of Cherith, consequently, in Elijah's native Gilead. Others are equally positive that it means "facing, or flowing, towards the Jordan," and seek for it either on the west or on the east of that river. From Josephus down to the present time it has more usually been identified with one of the torrent streams which takes its rise on the eastern side of Mount Ephraim and ends in the Jordan River. A number have been suggested, but whenever there is any certainty in identification, on the part of a traveler, it is more usually in favor of the wady Kelt. A slight resemblance in the

names has helped in this identification, though the resemblance is not enough to place this beyond conjecture. President McGarvey, who thinks this is the brook Cherith and bases his conclusion upon the suitableness of the narrow gorge as a hiding-place for the prophet, describes it thus: "It is the darkest and most desolate-looking gorge in all Palestine. On either side is a perpendicular wall of dark brown rock, having a rotten and crumbling appearance, and the narrow bottom of the chasm lies more than 2,000 feet below the road. A noisy stream dashes along its rocky bed, distinctly heard on the road above, and a narrow line of verdure marks its course. On one occasion the author entered this gorge at its mouth, where it breaks out into the plain, and ascended it about a mile, partly on horesback and partly on foot. It is scarcely possible to conceive the wild and desolate grandeur of the place. Its brown walls are only about twenty yards apart, and they are so high and steep as to shut out all the sky,

except a narrow strip overhead. There is no reason to doubt that it is the 'brook Cherith,' in which Elijah was hidden and fed by ravens until the brook ran dry. It is the only brook 'before Jordan' suitable for such concealment. The stream flowing through is sometimes a violent torrent, as appears from the large rocks in its bed, broken and rounded by the rush of the water. Conder saw it swollen by rain in a quarter of an hour till it was in places eight or ten feet deep. The wady heads near the road from Jerusalem to Bethel."

Zarephath. This is a village on the Mediterranean Sea, about half-way between Tyre and Sidon. "High up on the southern slope of a particularly isolated hill is a large village bearing the name of Surafend. In this name we have the Zarephath of the Old Testament and the Sarepta of the New; a place situated, according to Josephus and Pliny, between Tyre and Sidon and belonging to the territory of the latter." Robinson.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

The career of this remarkable prophet had its beginning within the reign of Ahab. Like Melchizedek, he is introduced "without father, without mother, without genealogy, and having no beginning of days." His dramatic appearance and his no less dramatic actions have taken deep hold upon the imaginations of men. No prophet is referred to more frequently in the New Testament than Elijah. His royal stand for, and unswerving devotion to, Jehovah in the face of opposition on the part of king, court, priests, prophet and people, constituted him one of the moral heroes to whom all ages have delighted to do honor. He came at the time when Ahab and Jezebel were doing all within their power to turn the nation of Israel

to the worship of Baal instead of Jehovah. The conception of God, or of gods, which was held by most peoples at that time was that he was national. That is, he belonged to a certain nation and land. Jezebel's effort to turn Israel to the worship of the Phœnician Baal was equivalent to an effort to attach Israel as a political dependency of Phœnicia. Elijah's work was, therefore, patriotic, as well as religious. And yet it was not patriotic in the sense that he was striving to build up the political life of the nation. The very reverse is true. His work undermined the stability of the northern kingdom. He wished to redeem from opposition the ancient and honorable conception that Jehovah was the God of Israel. To him every act of homage to Baal seemed

1 And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the sojourners of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As Jehovah, the God of Israel, liveth, before whom I stand, there shall

not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word. 2 And the word of Jehovah came unto him, saying, 3 Get thee hence, and turn thee eastward, and

to be an act of disloyalty to Jehovah, and Elijah openly raised the question whether Jehovah or Baal was God. All the powers of his life were thrown into the Jehovah side of this controversy. Elijah was, in a sense, the beginning of prophecy. At least he was the beginning of a certain phase of prophecy. It is true that there had been prophets before him, but in the case of Moses, Samuel, etc., their prophetic work was subordinate to other tasks. Nathan, Gad, Ahijah, etc., had been attached to the person of the rulers and had labored to direct them personally and politically. But with Elijah there begins a long line

of prophets whose relation to the government may be described as opposition. Of the prophets of the northern kingdom there is no exception to this statement. All opposed the policy of the northern kings. They appeared always at some moment of crisis and their effort was directed towards redeeming the nation from idolatry or other dangerous sin. The crisis which called forth the energies of Elijah was probably more acute than that of any other time, and though at times it seemed to the prophet himself that he had failed, yet he laid the foundation for a practical revival of the worship of Jehovah.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 1. Elijah: This name means "Jehovah is my God." No name was ever more appropriate, nor a better description of a man's life-work. It is so apt that one is inclined to believe that Elijah chose it himself. **Tishbite:** See Geographical Notes. **Sojourners of Gilead:** These were persons whose proper home was in some other region. It often means Gentiles who were making their home in Israel, but may, as in this case, refer to Israelites who had wandered into the territory of another tribe. See Judges 17:7; 2 Sam. 4:3. **Said unto Ahab:** Observe how short, incisive, and yet perfectly clear the message to Ahab is. **As Jehovah, the God of Israel, liveth:** In form this is an oath, yet it is so framed as to contrast Jehovah with Baal. He is "living" and not, like Baal, a "dead idol." He was the God of Israel, whereas Baal belonged to another nation. **Before whom I stand:** Denotes that Elijah was the

servant and ambassador of Jehovah. Cf. 1 Kings 12:6; Luke 1:19. **There shall not be dew nor rain:** This was a punishment threatened in the law for disobedience. (Lev. 26:18-20; Deut. 11:16-17.) Since Baal was the generating power of nature, this drought would be proof of his helplessness. This shows why drought was chosen, rather than some other demonstration of power. **But according to my word:** This shows that Elijah was the sole mediator between God and Israel. God had, for the time being, placed the power to withhold or to produce rain entirely in the hands of Elijah. The apostle James tells us that he obtained this power by prayer (5:17). All of this suggests that it was the prophet's own scheme. (See lesson for February the 19th.)

2. **Unto him . . . Elijah:** God takes the oversight of his prophet and protects him.

3. **Eastward:** This shows the inter-

hide thyself by the brook Cherith, that is before the Jordan. 4 And it shall be, that thou shalt drink of the brook; and I have commanded the ravens to feed thee there. 5 So he went and did according unto the word of Jehovah; for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith, that is before the Jordan. 6 And the ravens brought him bread and flesh in the morning, and bread and flesh in the evening; and he drank of the brook. 7 And it came to pass after a while, that the brook dried up, because there was no rain in the land.

8 And the word of Jehovah came unto

him, saying, 9 Arise, get thee to Zarephath, which belongeth to Sidon, and dwell there: behold, I have commanded a widow there to sustain thee. 10 So he arose and went to Zarephath; and when he came to the gate of the city, behold, a widow was there gathering sticks; and he called to her, and said, Fetch me, I pray thee, a little water in a vessel, that I may drink. 11 And as she was going to fetch it, he called to her, and said, Bring me, I pray thee, a morsel of bread in thy hand. 12 And she said, As Jehovah thy God liveth, I have not a cake, but a handful of meal

view between Ahab and Elijah took place in Samaria or its vicinity. Cherith . . . before the Jordan: See Geographical Notes.

4. Ravens: The Hebrew alphabet consists solely of consonants. The vowels were originally supplied by the reader and later by the scribes, who indicated them by a series of dots placed above and below the consonants. The word, as it now stands in the Hebrew, may mean either "ravens" or "merchants." The same consonants with other vowels may mean "Arabians." Some scholars understand the word to be a proper name and do not translate it; it then means the "Orbites," that is, inhabitants of the town Orbo. All of these translations have been proposed. The motive of those who favor some other than "ravens" is not always to do away with the miraculous, for they have been favored by those who had no predilection against miracles. The Jewish rabbis favored the translation "merchants," because the "ravens" were unclean birds (Deut. 14: 14). The prophet was not, however, to eat the ravens. The fact that he was fed twice a day (v. 6) favors the translation "ravens," for men would have saved themselves trouble and have avoid-

ed the possibility of detection by leaving him supplies to last for some time.

7. After a while: The Hebrew is literally "at the end of days." Sometimes this expression means "after a year," (Judges 11:40; 17:10; Lev. 25:29), and may mean that here.

9. Zarephath: See Geographical Notes. Belongeth to Sidon: No one would think of searching for him in the native land of Jezebel. His proximity to danger protected him. I have commanded a widow: How God had communicated his command to the woman is not stated. Possibly in no special way. The manner in which the prophet determines that she is the person to whom he is sent, favors this.

10. Gathering sticks: This suggested that she was poor and forsaken. Fetch me, etc.: Her compliance shows she was obliging.

11. Bring . . . a morsel of bread: A further test to determine whether she is the woman to whom God directed him.

12. As Jehovah thy God: This shows that she recognized Elijah as a prophet of Jehovah. Since she swears by his God she must have been a worshiper of him. My son: Since she says nothing

in the jar, and a little oil in the cruse: and, behold, I am gathering two sticks, that I may go in and dress it for me and my son, that we may eat it, and die. 13 And Elijah said unto her, Fear not; go and do as thou hast said; but make me thereof a little cake first, and bring it forth unto me, and afterward make for thee and for thy son. 14 For thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, The

jar of meal shall not waste, neither shall the cruse of oil fail, until the day that Jehovah sendeth rain upon the earth. 15 And she went and did according to the saying of Elijah: and she, and he, and her house, did eat *many* days. 16 The jar of meal wasted not, neither did the cruse of oil fail, according to the word of Jehovah, which he spake by Elijah.

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about her husband, it is evident that she is a widow. Hence Elijah knows her to be the woman he seeks. May eat it and die: The famine was afflicting the Phœnicians as well as the Israelites. This would be true, whether the drought extended into the former country or not, for this land depended almost entirely upon Israel for grain (1 Kings 5:9; Ez. 27:17; Acts 12:20). Menander, however, in his history of Ethbaal, the father of

Jezebel, mentions the drought as lasting one year (Josephus' "Antiquities," Book 8, chapter 13, section 2).

13-14. He makes this demand as a prophet. She evidently understands it in that sense. Her compliance shows that her faith did not fail. This confirms our conclusion that she was a worshiper of Jehovah. See Luke 4:26.

15. Her house: This would include relatives and others attached to her.

COMMENTS.

Background. Two facts appear across the centuries facing each other. They are the idolatry of Ahab's court and the fiery zeal for Jehovah of Elijah. The time when Elijah, meteor-like, flashes into view was sufficiently late in Ahab's reign for idolatry to be firmly established. "In the preceding chapters the inspired historian had, as it were, dug through the wall, and discovered to us the horrible abominations in which Israel during those melancholy times was so deeply immersed. Clouds and thick darkness covered the whole land; the images of Baalim and Ashtoreth fearfully gleam everywhere; idolatrous temples and heathen altars occupy the sacred soil; every hill smokes with their sacrifices, every vale resounds with the blasphemous yells of cruel priestcraft. The people drink in iniquity like water, and sport in shameless rites around their idols. Alas!

alas! how is the glory of Israel departed! Their light is become darkness, the salt has lost its savor, the fine gold has become dim! And now, while darkness reigns, darkness which can be felt, while no cheering star gleams through the universal blackness, on a sudden the history changes with the words '*and Elijah said.*' This man seems as if dropped from heaven into the midst of this awful night-piece, without father, without mother, without descent, as is written of Melchizedek. Lo, he stands forth in the midst of the desolation, but not without his God. Almost the only grain of salt in the general corruption, the only leaven that is to leaven the whole mass; and that we may learn at once who he is, he commences his career with an unheard of act of faith, by closing, in the name of the Lord, the heavens over Israel, and changing the firmaments into iron and

brass. Thanks be to God! the night is no longer so horrible, for a man of God now appears, like the rising moon, in the midst of it." (Krummacker.)

The Prophetic Character of Elijah: (v. 1.) In this solemn oath of the prophet we have a complete view of Elijah's prophetic character and the specific place which he occupied in the history of God's dealing with Israel. He addresses the idolatrous king; he appeals to the broken covenant; he invokes the penalty for breaking this covenant. It was his task to restore the covenant established under Moses. He was the restorer of that which Moses had established. This brings him into closer relationship with the original founder of the covenant. Hence it is not strange that in the Transfiguration scene he appears along with Moses as the joint representative of the Old economy. Since he labored to restore the broken covenant, his message was a call to repentance. He was properly the prophet of repentance, and his name is invoked by a later prophet to herald a time of general repentance and reformation. (Mal. 4:6.) In this character he was a fitting representative of the forerunner of Christ (Matt. 11:14; 17:11), whose entire message may almost be summed up in the one word, repent. Matt. 3:2.

God protects His Own. (vs. 3, 9.) The protection which God extended to the prophet are instances and illustrations of God's protection of his own. The writer did not understand that it was a parallel to some instances of protection extended infants by wild beasts, such as the nursing of Remus and Romulus by the wolf. It was a direct protection provided by God. If he really meant "merchant" or "Arabian" instead of "raven," it would have been no less miraculous to him. This doctrine of divine protection is variously and beautifully expressed in the 91st psalm.

"He will give his angels charge over thee, To keep thee in all thy ways. They shall bear thee up in their hands, Lest thou dash thy foot against a stone. Thou shalt tread upon the lion and the adder. The young lion and the serpent shalt thou trample under foot."

Purpose of His Concealment. (vs. 2-3.) Keil says the prophet concealed himself "in order to get out of the way of importunate prayer for the removal of the punishment." It is likely that a man of the prophet's strong will could withstand such prayers. The real reasons for his concealment are two: The first was "to be safe from the persecutions of Ahab and Jezebel; the second was that, having uttered a prediction of punishment, he may, by retiring into security, convince all men of the truth of his prediction by the result. In time they would feel greatly the need of him and of his God and so he would be able to work mightily for Jehovah." (Lange.)

God's Command and How Obeyed. (vs. 9-12.) When God tells Elijah to leave Cherith he reassures him by telling him: "I have commanded a widow (in Zarephath) to sustain you." Yet the prophet is not told more explicitly where and how the woman is to be found, nor has God's command been communicated to her in any way so that she was conscious that she was to be the human instrument in preserving the Lord's prophet. God's command to her seems to have been no otherwise expressed than through the general impulse to be kind and hospitable to all. We are not able to detect any more specific command to her than is given to all men now. Her obedience to this command consisted in freely yielding to the generous and kindly inclinations of her soul. This on our part is likewise obedience to the divine commandment.

Her Kindness. "Mark in the case of the widow, her disinterested kindness. Place ourselves for a moment in her position. A starving, dying woman, re-

duced to earth's last morsel, with her own and only child sinking fast under the grip of biting famine. What rare unselfishness! When this strange prophet, an alien in blood and religion, comes and reveals himself a fellow-sufferer, she has commiseration for him. No miserable exclusive feeling of difference in creed and country is suffered to interfere with the outflowings of tender compassion. Great was the sacrifice in that season of burning drought to part with a cup of water; and far more to surrender

some of the crumbs of that rapidly-exhausting barrel. But with a combination of faith and unselfishness which have few parallels in Scripture, she hastens, in obedience to Elijah's request, to relieve his distress and permit him to share the last pittance of her cupboard." (Macduff.) It was this kindness and trustfulness on her part which constituted the worthiness of this Gentile woman so warmly commended by the Saviour. (Luke 4:25, 26.)

THE LESSON STORY.

In the tenth year of Ahab's reign, the land being steeped in idolatry, suddenly the wicked king is confronted by Elijah. He comes to Ahab, who worships Baal, the god of power, with a message of supreme power. The king is startled at hearing him speak the name of Jehovah, the forgotten God, and at Elijah's word that, by allegiance to this "God of Israel," he is invested with far greater power than Baal, the secret and proof of which the prophet gives in the words, "Jehovah before whom I stand," and in the threatened drought to Israel, soon to follow. His message being given, obedient to Jehovah, he vanishes and takes refuge in a place of deep seclusion by the brook Cherith, where he is safely kept and nourished "morning and evening" with "bread and flesh" and supplied with water from the brook.

Finally, from long continued drought the brook dries up and Elijah is commanded to depart and go to Zarephath, near Sidon, where his needs shall be supplied by a certain widow living there. Shall we suppose that as the water diminished, Elijah's faith began to fail? If so, the Lord must have reproved him as he so often rebuked his disciples for their "little faith." With unquestioning trust he goes as bidden; and no sooner reaches the gate of the city than he is met by

a woman gathering sticks, of whom he asks a drink of water, and when she willingly goes to bring it, he further asks for a "morsel of bread."

At this the widow—for she it is to whom Jehovah sent him—reveals her deep poverty, and that of her son—only a little oil, only a handful of meal—just enough for one small cake which she and he must eat and then together die. God's prophet is sent for help to one whom he must help. The man of God tells her not to fear, but only first to minister to the stranger, and all her wants shall be supplied. She obeys, and through all the months of famine, we are told, the "jar of meal wasted not, and neither did the cruse of oil fail.

But Elijah proves yet a greater blessing in this home of poverty. Through his welcome presence not only is the meal increased but the widow's son is restored to life. He who knew how to pray for a nation and its wicked king, knew also how to pray for a widow and the restoration of her son.

Elijah has been called the "grandest and most romantic character that Israel ever produced." Certainly he towers above the world like a mountain peak of concrete faith in whose presence idolatrous peoples tremble and from whom kings might wisely take their reckonings.

"Remote from courts, corruption, crime, in that high shepherd land,
With God alone his soul had grown to stature bold and grand;
From Jacob's seed, or Jokshan's stock, unknown, he stands God's seer;

The Highlander of prophecy, God's glorious mountaineer;
For many a wld, in many a land, and many a peak sublime,
Can tell how solitude with God breeds souls that conquer time."

Taylor.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What were some indications of Jehoshaphat's wisdom? (See Lesson Story.)
2. What, on the other hand, was one conspicuous fault? (See Lesson Story.)
3. How did he contrast, however, with Ahab and other kings? (Lesson Story.)
4. What wise step did he take toward religious education? 2 Chron. 17:7-9.

5. What was the outward effect of his reign upon surrounding nations? 2 Chron. 17:10, 11.

6. In what lay the great secret of his success as a king? Matt. 6:31.

7. According to what eminent scriptural principle will he be judged? 2 Cor. 8:12; Luke 12:47, 48.

HELPFUL QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLICAL ANSWERS.

1. What is the meaning of the name, Elijah? (See Explanatory Note.)

2. What ancient person did Elijah resemble in the abruptness and dignity with which he appeared upon the scene? (See Historical Connection.)

3. Why were the dew and the rain to be withheld? (See Explanatory Note.)

4. What is the significance in the first verse of the words, "liveth" and "before whom I stand"? (See Explanatory Note.)

5. What precaution and what provision did God offer to Elijah? 1 Kings 17:2-4.

6. What two deeds of Elijah (vs. 1 and 5) indicate his faith?

7. What other feeders of Elijah have been suggested instead of ravens? (See Explanatory Note.)

8. Why did the Lord tell Elijah to

leave Cherith and go to Zarephath? 1 Kings 17:7, 8.

9. What indicate the hunger and thirst of the prophet upon his arrival at Zarephath? 1 Kings 17:10, 11.

10. What was the widow's objection to feeding Elijah? 1 Kings 17:12.

11. What did he tell her not to do and what did he ask her to do? 1 Kings 17:13.

12. What gladdening promise did Elijah declare to her? 1 Kings 17:14.

13. Later, what great sorrow befell the woman and what cause did she at first assign for it? 1 Kings 17:17, 18.

14. What did Elijah ask her to do; what acts did he perform and what did he ask God to do for the lad? 1 Kings 17:19-23.

15. What was her confession at the restoration of her son? 1 Kings 17:24.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

For a season kings will be overshadowed by prophets whose words were mightier than the kings' swords.

As the darkness of Ahab's reign demanded Elijah, so the night preceding Jesus' ministry required John the Bap-

tist with his call to repentance. Many who have dwelt much upon the "faith-only" theory of salvation have allowed themselves to overlook the persistent clarion call to repentance with which the kingdom of Christ was introduced. God's

ax is still at the root, not only of every malignant tree, but also of every fruitless tree.

Elijah is commended in the epistle of James as a man, who, having a like nature with ourselves, prevailed mightily with God in prayer. There is great encouragement given to righteous prayer, both in the Old and New Testament.

John the Baptist came in the spirit and power of Elijah; also in a garb and with a method and mission befitting the great prophet.

The courage, or "virtue," which Peter says Christians should add to their faith was added by Elijah to his faith. It took courage to meet Ahab. God cares for his faithful servants; and warns the unfaithful. John 21:5-12.

As the rugged work of John was necessary in preparation for the coming King of Righteousness, so was the Old Testament history and prophecy valuable as an introduction to the New.

Faith, repentance and obedience to God were required in the Old as truly as in the New dispensation. But as our light is greater than that of Ahab's period, so is our responsibility the greater. A greater than Elijah is here. As the Old Testament set forth God's rule and providence in the nation, so the New Testament sets forth his Headship and Shepherding love over the church.

Ahab and Jezebel were not suddenly destroyed at the word of Elijah, but were warned as to the inevitable wages of their sin.

Elijah was more honored by the writers of the New than of the Old Testament.

After all we may say of Elijah, the loyal seer, how much greater in character and mission was Paul; not because greater in his own native qualities, but because endowed with the superior grace of Christ.

Lesson VII.

February 12.

ELIJAH'S VICTORY OVER THE PROPHETS OF BAAL.

1 Kings 18:1, 2; 17-40. (Print 18:25-39.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Choose you this day whom ye will serve. Joshua 24:15.**Memory Verses**—38, 39. **Suggested Reading**—1 Kings 18. **Time**—Immediately after the close of the time of the previous lesson, about 915 B. C. **Persons**—Elijah, Prophets of Baal. **Place**—Mount Carmel.**DAILY READINGS.**

- Feb. 6....M—1 Kings 18:1-19—The Summons of Elijah Unto Ahab.
 Feb. 7....T—1 Kings 18:20-24—"The God that Answereth by Fire."
 Feb. 8....W—1 Kings 18:25-29—The Failure of the Prophets of Baal.
 Feb. 9....T—1 Kings 18:30-40—The Fire of the Lord Fell.
 Feb. 10....F—Ex. 14:10-31—Cloud of Light Fighting for Israel.
 Feb. 11....S—Judges 6:1-24—There Went up Fire out of the Rock.
 Feb. 12....S—Judges 13:2-20—The Angel Ascended in the Flame.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

At its northwestern corner Mount Ephraim breaks down as elsewhere, but here it does not drop to the level of the plain. Low hills form a saddle between it and a high, elongated ridge which, stretching towards the northwest for a distance of about twelve miles, ends in a bold, abrupt cliff, jutting far out into the sea. This ridge is Mount Carmel. Its height is mainly about 1500 feet above the sea, though its eastern end is three hundred feet higher. It corresponds to Bashan on the east of the Jordan, and the two are often associated together in the Scriptures. (Isa. 33:9; 50:19; Nah. 1:4.) Sweeping seaward, as this ridge does, it is the first of the hills to receive the rain, and the downfall is therefore apt to be more copious. Hence it was usually clothed in verdure. The prophet's most striking figure of utter desolation was that Carmel should languish (Nah. 1:4; Amos 1:2). The excellency of Carmel was also his figure for the lavish goodness of God (Isa. 35:2). Today the slopes of Carmel are covered, for

the most part, with wild growth; oaks and carab mainly, but in ancient times it was cultivated especially in the vine and olive, as the numerous ruins of presses and drain pipes testify. Next to its fertility Carmel was famous in ancient times as a place of retreat and worship. It was claimed for Baal in Ahab's time, but before the time of Elijah an altar dedicated to Jehovah had stood on its eastern platform. On this mountain Elisha had a retreat (2 Kings 2:25). Hither the people were accustomed to go at new moons and sabbaths (2 Kings 4:23-26). Amos speaks of fugitives taking refuge in Carmel (9:3) and the prophet Micah, of Israel as dwelling solitarily in the midst of Carmel (7:14). But the history of Carmel that is known to most of us consists almost exclusively of this story of contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal. The eastern end of the ridge terminates abruptly, drops to a lower level where there is an extensive shelf or platform, and from the edge of this the mountain slopes again steeply to the

plain. This shelf or platform just beneath the eastern summit is the traditional site of the contest, and corresponds excellently with all the conditions. As the multitude stood on this elevated spot, a magnificent view spread before them. To the west the high ridge of Carmel shut off the immediate view of the sea, though its coast-line could be traced north and south. To the northeast was Galilee, and to the southeast, Mount Ephraim. Between these and stretching from the foot of Carmel was a great plain, the plain of Esdraelon, now parched and dusty from the long drought. Sixteen miles due east across this plain on a low spur of Mount Gilboa stood Ahab's capital, Jezreel. Few sites of Bible scenes can be identified with greater certainty

than this place of contest. The narrative imposes certain conditions upon the place. It was on the mountain, yet there was sufficient level ground for a great multitude to assemble. It was reached by Ahab's chariots. Fire-wood and water were near at hand. The brook Kishon was below, and the top of Carmel was above. While the servant, by going a short distance from his master could see over the Mediterranean. All of these conditions are met by the traditional site. It is a wide platform on the mountain slope, the top of Carmel with its view of the sea being above, and a road leading downward to the plain and the Kishon below. A perennial spring gushing out near by supplies the last needed item for the identification.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

Our last lesson left Elijah in the secure retreat of the widow's home in Zarephath. Here he remained for many days (18:1). Since the drought was over three years in duration (Luke 4:25) and he stayed in Cherith probably a year (1 Kings 17:7), he must have remained in the widow's home about two years. Then at the command of God he came out of his retreat. The country was parched and desolate as a result of the drought, and "the famine was sore in Samaria" (v. 2). Ahab and his officer, Obadiah, were out in search of water and pasture, that they might keep life within a remnant of the royal animals, when Elijah appeared to the later. He was a worshiper of Jehovah. He had braved the possibility of Jezebel's anger to the extent of protecting a hundred prophets of Jehovah from her persecutions. The conversation between him and Elijah reveals what had taken place during the prophet's absence. Search had been instituted by Ahab in all neighboring nations for the prophet whose word alone could bring the long-delayed rain. So diligent had the search been that

all neighboring kings had been put under the most solemn oaths that the hiding place of Elijah was not known to them. An atmosphere of mystery had gathered about Elijah. Obadiah fears to go to tell Ahab that he has been seen, lest he shall disappear again and the disappointed wrath of the king will revenge itself on his servant. But Elijah gives his assurance and the king is summoned. The meeting between the king and the prophet was dramatic. Each charges the other with being the cause of the nation's sufferings, but the conversation is cut short by the prophet, who asks that the people, and especially the priests of Baal, be gathered on Mount Carmel. The king complies and a great throng gather on the slopes of this mountain. Suffering has taken the spirit out of the people, but they are not yet convinced that their privations are due to illegal worship. Elijah's demand that they make choice between Jehovah and Baal is met by sullen silence. Then he makes a further proposal that a contest for supremacy be set between Jehovah and Baal. The condi-

tions were fair and impartial. If there is advantage at all, it is in Baal's favor. He had four hundred and fifty prophets, but Elijah was the only representative of Jehovah. For each god the altar was to be prepared, the victim placed upon it and that God who answered by fire from heaven was to be worshiped. The people could not refuse such a contest. They gave consent and the battle between the gods was on.

The Worship of Baal. The following extracts from Dollinger's "The Gentile and the Jew" throw light upon the worship of Baal described in this lesson. "In earlier times Baal had been worshiped without an image in Tyre and its colonies; but for a long time now his worship had grown into an idolatry of the most wanton character, directed by a numerous priesthood, who had their headquarters in Tyre. A notion of the vast number of the priests of Baal is given by the fact that in the small kingdom of Israel alone there were four hundred and fifty priests of the god, besides four hundred of Aschera. As the people of Asia distinguished, properly speaking, only two deities of nature, a male generative and a female conceptive one, so Baal was of an elemental and sidereal nature at once. As the former, he was god of the creative powers, bringing all things to life everywhere, and, in particular, god of fire; but he was sun-god besides, and, as such, to human lineaments he added the crown of rays about the head peculiar to this god. In the one

quality as well as the other he was represented at the same time as sovereign of the heavens (Baalsamen), and of the earth by him impregnated. Accordingly, the Baal worshiped in the Syrian cities of Heliopolis, Emesa, and Palmyra, appeared to the Greeks to be their Helios; and on an inscription at Palmyra he is actually styled Baal-Schemesch, Lord of the Sun. . . . To the exciting din of drums, flutes, and inspired songs, the Galli cut themselves on the arms; and the effect of this act, and of the music accompanying it, was so strong upon mere spectators, that all their bodily and mental powers were thrown into a tumult of excitement; and they too, seized by the desire to lacerate themselves, deprived themselves of their manhood by means of potsherds lying ready for the purpose. . . . The initiated of the Syrian goddess also wandered from place to place, taking with them a veiled image, or symbol of their goddess, and clad in women's apparel of many colors, and with their faces and eyes painted in female fashion; armed with swords and scourges, they threw themselves by a wild dance into bacchanalian ecstasy, in which their long hair was dragged through the mud. They bit their own arms, and then hacked themselves with their swords, or scourged themselves in penance for a sin supposed to have been committed against the goddess. In these scenes, got up to aid the collection of money, it was a trick they must have practiced to cut themselves so adroitly as not to inflict any very serious wounds."

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 25. Choose you one bullock: Elijah allows the priests to choose in order that they may have every outward advantage, and that there may be no ground for cavil after their failure is evident. **For ye are many:** Elijah's reasons why they should dress their bullock first. Just what was the force of that

reason is not evident. Possibly because they could dress it more quickly, or because he wishes to defer to the majority. It is evident that Elijah planned the contest shrewdly to produce the desired effect. All is designed to key up the interest and expectation to a high pitch and bring the climax at the end. To have

25 And Elijah said unto the prophets of Baal, Choose you one bullock for yourselves, and dress it first; for ye are many; and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under. 26 And they took the bullock which was given them, and they dressed it, and called on the name of Baal from morning even until noon, saying, O Baal, hear us. But there was no voice, nor any that answered. And they leaped about the altar which was made. 27 And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them, and said, Cry

aloud; for he is a god: either he is musing, or he is gone aside, or he is on a journey, or peradventure he sleepeth and must be awaked. 28 And they cried aloud, and cut themselves after their manner with knives and lances, till the blood gushed out upon them. 29 And it was so, when midday was past, that they prophesied until the time of the offering of the *evening* oblation; but there was neither voice, nor any answer, nor any that regarded.

brought this climax earlier would have resulted in flagging interest at the end, an obscuring of the main point, which was to prove Jehovah's greatness over Baal, and it would have given the priests of Baal an opportunity to refuse to proceed further. Put no fire under: The part which the fire had in sacrifice was to carry the sacrifice upward to the deity. The sending of fire was a sign of power and also signified that the sacrifice was acceptable. Since Baal was the sun-god, it was evidently within his power to send the fire.

26. Dressed it: See verse 23. They cut it in pieces and placed the pieces upon the altar. From morning till noon: The priests of Baal did their best. O Baal, hear us: One of the most certain instances of "vain repetition of the Gentiles" condemned by the Lord (Matt. 6:7). There was probably a sort of chant or supplicatory hymn in which this recurred as the refrain. Leaped about the altar: Margin "limped;" the same word is used in verse 21: "How long go ye limping," etc. It is evident that the priests danced about the altar. Dancing was a frequent accompaniment of all oriental worship, especially in the worship of nature gods like Cybele. Two explanations have been offered as to the reason why it is here called "limping." One is that it is so called in derision, and the other that the dancing was baccha-

nalian in character. They had become intoxicated with excitement, and in their dancing reeled and staggered like drunken men.

27. Elijah had two objects to accomplish by his taunts, (1) to rouse the priests to greater exertions and so make their failure the more complete, and (2) to impress their failure on the populace and so impress them with the truth that Baal is no god. Elijah ridicules the conception that God could be like a man. This was the tendency of all idolatrous people, even the Greeks and the Romans. Under its influence the Israelites were prone to regard God as possessing human characteristics. "Thou thoughtest that I was altogether such a one as thyself" (Ps. 50:21). No better example of irony is to be found in any literature than this speech of Elijah's.

28. They cried aloud: Elijah's taunts had the effect which he designed. Cut themselves: In the frenzy of their dance they inflicted wounds upon themselves in the belief that this would be pleasing to the god. This custom in ancient heathen worship is well attested. It is mentioned by Plutarch, Lucian, Seneca, Lactantius and Dio Cassian. It was an approach to human sacrifice.

29. Prophesied: Here the word means "raved," "acted in a frantic manner." This was a meaning which the word often had in early times. Saul

30 And Elijah said unto all the people, Come near unto me; and all the people came near unto him. And he repaired the altar of Jehovah that was thrown down. 31 And Elijah took twelve stones, according to the number of the tribes of the sons of Jacob, unto whom the word of Jehovah came, saying, Israel shall be thy name. 32 And with the stones he built an altar in the name of Jehovah; and he made a trench about the altar, as great as would contain two measures of seed. 33 And he put the wood in order, and cut the bullock in pieces, and laid it on the wood. And he said, Fill four jars with water, and pour it on the burnt-offering, and

on the wood. 34 And he said, Do it the second time; and they did it the second time. And he said, Do it the third time; and they did it the third time. 35 And the water ran round about the altar; and he filled the trench also with water. 36 And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the *evening* oblation, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, O Jehovah, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. 37 Hear me, O Jehovah, hear me, that this people may know that thou, Jehovah, art God, and that thou hast turned their

"propheesied" (margin "raved") when an evil spirit possessed him (1 Sam 18:10). Cf. 1 Sam. 19:24; 1 Kings 22:12. Until the time of the offering of the evening oblation: This means the time of the usual evening sacrifice. The time is nowhere specified in the Scriptures, but the law gave the direction to offer it at even (Hebrew: "between the evenings") (Ex. 29:39-41). Probably, as Josephus says, about three o'clock. Cf. Acts 3:1. The priests of Baal continued until that time, but Elijah commenced his preparations in disregard of them at the close of their supplication. His sacrifice was offered at the usual time (vs. 3-6).

30. **Altar of Jehovah:** One of the ancient high places which was used in the worship of Jehovah and which existed in disregard of the one altar at Jerusalem specified by the book of Deuteronomy. Asa and Jehoshaphat did not destroy these in their reforms (1 Kings 11:14; 22:43). This one had probably been brought into its condition of disrepair by the order of Ahab (1 Kings 19:10).

31. **Twelve stones:** This act of Elijah was a tacit rebuke of the divided

kingdom. The number of the tribes was twelve, not ten. The twelve and not part of them constituted Israel. In doing this he probably imitated Moses (Ex. 24:4).

32. **Built an altar:** With the twelve stones selected from the ruins of the old altar, he built a new one. **In the name of Jehovah:** He dedicated it to Jehovah. **Trench:** To hold the water he was to pour over the altar (v. 35). The author's description of the size of this trench is not clear to us, for our scholars cannot agree as to how it should be translated. A measure means a "seah," which equals about three gallons. Either the trench would hold six gallons, which seems small, or it was as deep as a two-seah measure. We would say, as deep as a half bushel measure.

33. **Putting the wood in order, cutting into pieces and laying these on the wood** are all specified in the law (Lev. 1:3-9). **Jars:** The common earthen water jars which were used for carrying water. **Water:** This was to remove any suspicion of fraud and to increase the marvelousness of the burning. That frauds were committed at some heathen altars is

heart back again. 38 Then the fire of Jehovah fell, and consumed the burnt-offering, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water

that was in the trench. 39 And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, Jehovah, he is God; Jehovah, he is God.

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attested in an oration attributed to Chrysostom. He says, "I speak as an eye-witness. In the altars of the idols there are beneath the altar channels and a concealed pit, the deceivers blow up a fire from beneath upon the altar, by which many are deceived and believe that the fire comes from heaven."

36. The evening oblation: If this was at three o'clock, there would remain suf-

ficient time before darkness for the events described in the rest of the chapter O Jehovah, the God, etc.: The language of the prayer carries us back to the account of the burning bush (Ex. 3:5). Elijah is consciously imitating Moses. See last lesson.

39. The people understand and acknowledge the true meaning of the whole scene.

COMMENTS.

Light on Idolatrous Worship. One of the values of this narrative is its historical worth, that is the light which it throws upon the idolatrous customs of ancient times. Whatever may be the date of Kings, and by whomsoever it was written, its author lived in the midst of idolatrous times, and a short journey from his home would have enabled him to be a spectator at the worship of some idolatrous shrine, even if such scenes were not to be witnessed in his own land. Few, if any, writers of antiquity have given us so complete and accurate descriptions of the ancient worship of Semitic peoples. These details are corroborated by other writers whose religious views were very unlike those of the author of Kings. No modern writer would attempt to describe the Semitic worship of Baal without making use of the 18th chapter of 1 Kings. The one fact which stands prominently forth after a careful reading of this narrative is that the religion of Jehovah was vastly superior to that of Baal. The author does not present this worship of Jehovah as the highest and best worship of him. It was not the ideal worship the Lord

had made known, yet it is incomparably superior to the devotion offered to Baal, just as Jehovah is a living God while Baal is no god. The cult of Baal was complicated. It required a small army of priests. It consisted of formal ritual. The prayers offered were vain repetitions. It was accompanied with bacchanalian dancing and self-mutilation. It was impotent. Such worship could never uplift the hearts and lives of the worshipers. On the other hand, the worship of Jehovah was based on a divine revelation. It was simple and direct. Even its sacrifice was accompanied by the recognition of spiritual conceptions concerning Jehovah. It was in the fullness of power.

The Truth Courts Investigation. This was a contest between truth and falsehood. We are not told the attitude of the Baal worshipers towards this contest. They had no choice in the matter. The king was desperate. He must have rain and the prophet had summoned the people as a preliminary step to bringing it. The people, too, are in dire straits and the prophet's just proposal leads them to speak in favor of the trial of

power. So the priests of Baal, willingly or unwillingly, are thrust forward into the contest. On the other hand it is of Elijah's choosing. He is conscious that right is on his side, and he desires the fullest and freest investigation. He is so confident of success that he is willing that the other side shall have all outward advantages. He shatters beforehand all possibility of fraud on his part. All he asks for is that truth and falsehood may be brought face to face and left to struggle alone. This should always be the attitude of those who seek the truth. It has nothing to fear from any investigation. "Every one that doeth evil hateth the light and cometh not to the light, lest his works should be reformed. But he that doeth the truth cometh to the light that his works may be made manifest, that they have been wrought in God." (John 3:20, 21.)

The Prophet's Irony. Elijah's taunts were not frivolous, nor unworthy of a great prophet. They proceeded from deep earnestness and profound religious conviction. He was battling for the true God. He certainly knew him to be not merely the supreme God, but the only God. His language indicates this (vs. 15 and 36).

In the place of this sovereign deity, the worshipers of Baal were seeking to substitute that which, according to their own claims on his behalf, was inferior. Elijah can not better perform his task than by pointing out the inferiority of the false god to the true, and there was no more effective way of doing this than by means of ridicule. Elijah hoped to convince the people, and they would be

susceptible to the force of this kind of argument. It is a legitimate weapon in any noble cause, and idolatry yields itself readily as a subject of sober-minded ridicule. The prophets often used it as a weapon against the false gods which they combated. See Isa. 40:18-21; 41:6-7; 44:9-22.

The Slaughter of the Priests. The slaughter of the priests of Baal has often been characterized as fanatical and cruel. From the standpoint of the New Testament it is indeed indefensible, and does not accord with Christ's teaching. But this took place in a ruder, harsher age, when mankind had not yet attained to the standard of the Golden Rule, and was not prepared to shape its life according to the principle of universal love. To have spared these prophets would have ruined Elijah's work. It would not have been understood by Ahab, nor by the people. To them it would have seemed that the prophet lacked in seriousness. Looked at from our modern point of view, this, like many another deed of ancient times, seems needlessly harsh, but Elijah is not to be tried by the standards of our times, but by those of his own. Some objector will point, however, to his claim of inspiration. It is true he claims to be God-sent, but inspiration does not remove a man out of his age and transport him to a distant one. Nor does it change the environment and the circumstances of his life. If it did, then the people to whom he spoke must have been inspired, too, in order that they might comprehend him. God does not thrust ideals upon people more rapidly than they can grow up to them.

THE LESSON STORY.

For two years Elijah remains in his safe retreat at Zarephath, cared for by God's providence and waiting for the famine to fulfill its purpose. For three years and a half the scourge had been

upon rebellious Israel. So sore had been the drought that all was parched and barren; "the face of the earth seemed to have been burned bare by the wrath of God."

The question may be asked: "Why did God thus punish Israel?"

Surely for Israel's good, as, perhaps, in no other way could the nation have been made humble and submissive. At last to Elijah comes the message to go and once more stand before king Ahab. The waiting time at Zarephath had not been lost upon the prophet's life. Through communion with God and prayer he had been made strong for his meeting with Ahab and for the desperate battle upon Mount Carmel. As Elijah goes forth to front the king he is met in the way by Obadiah, another of God's prophets. He is going in one direction while Ahab goes in another. They are in search of water for the perishing cattle.

Obadiah's courage is sharply tested when he is asked to go and tell the king that, "Elijah is here." In this the timid prophet sees danger, and draws back. Yet he assures Elijah that it is not through lack of faithfulness, for in the time of Jezebel's fierce persecution he had risked his life to hide one hundred of Jehovah's prophets in a cave and supply them with bread and water. But he fears to say "Elijah is here," when, in a moment, he might vanish and his own life be required by the angry king.

Elijah then encourages him by promising that "as the Lord liveth" he will see Ahab that very day, and Obadiah goes quickly to herald his coming to the king. In spite of the famine Ahab meets Elijah with no word of penitence for his and Israel's sin. He even dares to call the prophet "the troubler of Israel;" but Elijah sternly rebukes him, saying that the curse upon the land is due to Israel's forsaking God for Baal. Forthwith the "hunted prophet" then assumes the right of king, and orders Ahab to gather Israel and all the priests of Baal upon Mount Carmel. The prophet's word implies that the issue between the two religions is to be fought out there, and he is not afraid

to make the test. Ahab, trusting in numbers and not in God, is eager to obey and makes ready for the contest. A number of days must have passed between this meeting and the gathering upon Mount Carmel, but, finally, upon this lofty height, overlooking the Great Sea, are assembled the hosts of Israel with their king and all the proud priests of Baal.

Against all this multitude Elijah does not fear to stand alone, for "one with God is a majority."

This is to be a great decision day in Israel and the sign proposed by which to choose between the false and true religion is the descent of fire from heaven to consume the sacrifice in answer to prayer. The Lord that answers by prayer shall be owned and served. All morning the priests cry aloud in vain to Baal. At noon, stung by Elijah's ridicule, they cry yet louder and cut their flesh in frenzy; but still no answer! At last, when priests and people despair and yield the conflict, the prophet calmly rises. In this supreme hour he will not sanction a divided kingdom, but, taking twelve stones to represent the twelve tribes, and not the ten, he builds an altar to the God of heaven. Cutting a trench around it he lays upon it the wood and the offering. To heighten the miracle, four jars three times are filled with water, which poured upon the sacrifice, the wood, the altar, and, running down, fills the trench. Then follows Elijah's prayer of simple, humble faith in the "Lord God of Abraham," and, swift as lightning, comes the answer.

The fire descends, burning not only the sacrifice, the wood, the stones and dust, but also the water in the trench. The mighty miracle prevails. The people, falling upon their faces and hiding their eyes from the light, cry aloud in chorus: "Jehovah, he is God!" "Jehovah, he is God!"

The bloody scene that followed was

not "a fanatical massacre, but a terrible execution." It was needful that the priests of Baal should have been slain, for had they lived, the people, in spite of the miracle, would soon have drifted back into idolatry.

The scene upon Carmel speaks through all the ages of the necessary conflict be-

tween the evil and the good, the false and the true; and also of the certain victory of the right and of those who faithfully represent it.

"Once to every man and nation
Comes the moment to decide
In the strife of Truth with falsehood
For the good or evil side."

Lowell.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. How is the first appearance of Elijah described? 1 Kings 17:1.
2. For what great and worthy purpose did he come? 1 Kings 18:37.
3. Where did he go and why after his first message to Ahab? 1 Kings 17:3.
4. How long was he in concealment from Ahab? 1 Kings 18:1.

5. When the brook failed what provision was made for the prophet? 1 Kings 17:9.
6. How do you suppose Elijah knew the person to whom God sent him? (Lesson Story.)
7. What two comforts did the prophet bring to the widow?

HELPFUL QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. What indicated that the famine was sore in the land? 1 Kings 18:5, 6.
2. Whom did Elijah meet first upon his return to Israel? 1 Kings 18:7.
3. Who was Obadiah and what special good deed of faith had he done? 1 Kings 18:3, 4.
4. What did Elijah request of Obadiah at their meeting? 1 Kings 18:8.
5. Why did the latter hesitate to obey Elijah? 1 Kings 18:12.
6. What efforts had Ahab made to find Elijah? 1 Kings 18:10.
7. How did Elijah make Obadiah willing to obey him? 1 Kings 18:15.
8. With what seven words did Ahab address Elijah? 1 Kings 18:17.
9. What is the full meaning of Elijah's prompt reply? 1 Kings 18:18.
10. Thereupon what did the prophet ask at the hand of Ahab? 1 Kings 18:19.

11. What persons assembled for the great demonstration on Carmel? 1 Kings 18:20.
12. What reasonable demand did Elijah then make? 1 Kings 18:21.
13. What test did he propose for ascertaining the true God? 1 Kings 18:22-24.
14. Describe in your own words the scene in which the priests endeavored to comply with the conditions of Elijah's challenge and tell what three acts of the Baal worshipers, and what one act of Elijah, are mentioned in this connection. 1 Kings 18:26-29.
15. How did Elijah's manner contrast with that of the idolatrous priests? 1 Kings 18:30-37.
16. What was the immediate result? 1 Kings 18:39.
17. What was Elijah's command and why so readily obeyed? 1 Kings 18:40.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. The three years' solitude of Elijah was necessary as a preparation for the great victory on Carmel. He had been in training with Jehovah.
2. Solitude likewise preceded the ap-

pearance of John the Baptist as a mighty preacher of righteousness. It also preceded the work of Moses.

3. Elijah, like John, was sententious and direct in speech.

4. One man with God is greater than ten thousand depending upon Baal.

5. The groaning and bloodshed among the nations have come through sin.

6. It would seem impossible to present a more picturesque demonstration of the folly and sin of idolatrous worship.

7. The incorrigible enemies of righteousness were slain under the Old Testament dispensation. "They that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses. Of how much sorer punishment shall he be thought worthy who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant with which he was sanctified an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?" Heb. 10:28, 29. The greater the grace—the greater the light and opportunity—the greater the sin of disobedience! A greater than Elijah speaks to us and our children.

8. Our great enemies, which are passions and appetites, worldliness, covetousness, pride, and selfishness, must be put to death. Col. 3:5-11; James 4:4.

9. To confess Jehovah as Israel confessed (1 Kings 18:39) is not enough.

10. The dominion of sin, the rule of the spiritual Ahabs and Jezebels, must be broken.

God hates iniquity and loves righteousness as much in the present day as he did in Elijah's day.

Stupendous sin to-day must be met by stupendous faith and courage even as it was met in the darkest night of Israel.

Communion with God is as essential to rugged faith now as it was at Cherith and Zarephath.

Victories of Carmel are more impressive than the victories of Zarephath, but in the eyes of the Lord our Judge they are no greater. The giving of the cup of water in the name of a disciple—according to the spirit of true discipleship—the offering of one's all to God in the one talent or the one mite, the removal of the stone of stumbling, the edification of children—these are great when the spirit of great faith and love prompts them.

Lesson VIII.

February 19.

ELIJAH'S FLIGHT AND RETURN.

1 Kings 18:41—19:21. (Print 19:1-21.)

GOLDEN TEXT—They that wait upon Jeſovah shall renew their strength. Isaiah 40:31.

Memory Verses—11-13. **Time**—Immediately after the time of the previous lesson, about 915 B. C. The lesson occupies about two months. **Persons**—Ahab, Jezebel, Elijah, Elisha. **Places**—Jezreel, Beersheba, Wilderness, Mount Horeb, the Wilderness of Damascus, and Abel-Meholah.

DAILY READINGS.

- Feb. 13.... M—1 Kings 18:41-46—Elijah Running Before Ahab.
 Feb. 14.... T—1 Kings 19:1-8—Elijah under the Juniper Tree.
 Feb. 15.... W—1 Kings 19:9-14—The Lord in the Still Small Voice.
 Feb. 16.... T—1 Kings 19:15-21—Message and New Ministrant.
 Feb. 17.... F—Num. 11:1-15—"The Despairing Appeal of Moses."
 Feb. 18.... S—Ps. 73:1-78—"My Flesh and my Heart Faileth."
 Feb. 19.... S—Ps. 38:1-22—My Groaning is not Hid From Thee.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Jezreel. See Introduction to lesson for February 26.

Beersheba. This was the place to which Elijah fled, and was the most southern city of Judah, as the formula, "From Dan to Beersheba," testifies. It was really an outpost of the desert, the last spot that was able to make a stand against the wilderness to the south. Its ability to withstand the desert was due to the fact that wells of water existed here. It was the place to which herdsmen brought their flocks and hithermen came to worship (Amos 5:5; 8:14).

The Wilderness. After leaving Beersheba Elijah plunged into the wilderness, a region of great extent and called by the Hebrews, "The Negeb," which in our English version is translated "the south," but which really means "the dry." It was the region south of Judah and between the Mediterranean and the great depression which extends southward from the Dead Sea and the Jordan

valley. It is a broken region that becomes more and more parched as one goes to the south. "The vegetation even after rain is very meager, and in summer totally disappears. No great route now leads, or ever has led, through this district."

Mount Horeb. This was the sacred mountain where Moses saw the burning bush (Ex. 3:1), and from which the Lord later promulgated the law (Deut. 5:2). The relation of the two names Horeb and Sinai is much disputed. Robinson thought Horeb the name of the range of which Sinai was a peak. Gesenius holds precisely the opposite view. A study of the occurrence of the two names seems to indicate that it is a distinction of usage. In Leviticus and Numbers the name of the mountain from which the law was given to Moses is Sinai, and in Deuteronomy it is Horeb. Later writers use both names (1 Kings 8:9; Judges 5:5; 1 Kings 19:8; 2 Chron. 5:10; Ps. 68:17; 106:19).

The Wilderness of Damascus. This was the district to the north of the prophet's own home in Gilead, between Bashan and Damascus, and in the New Testament times was known as Iturea and Gaulanitis.

Abel-Meholah. This place is mentioned but three times in the Old Testa-

ment. The Midianites, fleeing from Gideon, passed the borders of this place (Judges 7:22). It was also the home of the prophet Elisha (1 Kings 19:16). It was south of Bethshan in the valley of the Jordan (1 Kings 4:12), and is identified by Condor with a village nine and a half miles from Bethshan.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

The popular verdict that Jehovah was God led to the slaughter of the prophets of Baal. They had been defeated in their contest. Their god was without power, and so no voice of protest was raised and no hand was outstretched to restrain Elijah from making them feel the full force of their defeat. They were hurried to the Kishon below and slain. Their bodies were cast into its bed, whence the flood, which was soon to rise, would wash them to the sea. The prophet urged the king to eat, and encouraged him with assurance of rain. Elijah, however, did not join in the feast which followed. He withdrew to the top of the mountain and assumed the attitude of prayer. A servant that is now mentioned for the first time, is sent to a still higher point, whence a view over the sea was to be obtained. Six times he came back repeating that nothing unusual was to be seen, but the seventh time he told of a cloud arising from the sea no larger than a man's hand. At once Ahab was warned to make haste in returning to Jezreel, lest he should be stopped by streams swollen from the

unusual rain. Before the journey could be commenced the sky grew black, the wind arose and the rain came. The prophet, strengthened and refreshed by the divine hand, ran as an attendant upon the chariot of Ahab across the rain-drenched plain to the gate of Jezreel. Here, however, his elation was soon gone. Depression followed, and he fled from the capital, the kingdom and his work. The scene on Mount Carmel was the climax of Elijah's career. He had for a number of years been gathering influence for a great dramatic scene to enforce the supremacy of Jehovah. This long course of events reached its culmination in the slaughter of the prophets of Baal. It did not result in all of the desirable consequences which Elijah expected. Ahab gave no indication of an intention to transfer his worship from Baal to Jehovah. The people had no zeal for Jehovah; and Jezebel, confirmed and fanatical devotee of Baal that she was, sent to the prophet a message declaring her intention to slay him as he had slain Baal's prophets. The disappointment was too great for Elijah. He turned and ran.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 2. Jezebel sent a messenger: We infer that it was sent that very night. There is no certainty as to what Jezebel's notion was in sending a messenger to Elijah. It is generally assumed that she was confident of her ability

to seize the prophet, but Elijah's past movements have not been such as to give her such confidence. Besides, "if she really wished to arrest Elijah, why did she not send an officer instead of a messenger?" It seems most probable

1 And Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. 2 Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do to me and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to-morrow about this time. 3 And when he saw that, he arose, and went for his life, and

came to Beersheba, which belongeth to Judah, and left his servant there. 4 But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper-tree: and he requested for himself that he might die, and said, It is enough; now, O Jehovah, take away my life; for I am not better than my fathers. 5 And he lay down and slept

that she really wished to frighten him away. Her terrible oath meant, "If you are still here, I will kill you." Jezebel could not afford to oppose too completely the popular verdict in favor of Elijah's God. The kings of Israel were never so absolute in their possession of the throne as to defy their subjects. So let the gods do to me, etc.: The usual form of oath. See Ruth 1:17; 1 Sam. 14:44; 20:13; 1 Kings 2:23; Jer. 22:5. Jezebel swears by all the gods. She is a thorough idolater. By tomorrow about this time: She gave him twenty-four hours to escape or die.

3. He saw: How matters stood—that his plans were miscarrying, and that it was not safe for him to remain. Almost all of the ancient versions have instead of this, "He feared." Saw, arose, went: The original Hebrew is very terse and the movement rapid to indicate the swiftness of Elijah's movements. For his life: To preserve his life. To Beersheba: About ninety miles from Jezreel. It would be late on the second day before Beersheba could possibly be reached. Belongeth to Judah: It belonged to the tribe of Simeon (Josh. 19:2). It was at this time, however, in the kingdom of Judah, and this is mentioned to show that Elijah escaped from Jezebel's jurisdiction. This was almost the only direction in which escape was open to him. To have gone east or west he would have reached the desert or the

sea before he escaped from Ahab's territory. Northward he would have found himself in the territory of Jezebel's father. Left his servant there: Possibly because the servant was exhausted, but the language seems to imply that it was an act of Elijah's. The prophet wished to be alone in his sorrow and discouragement. This is the reason why he sought the wilderness.

4. A day's journey: No fixed distance, like a Sabbath day's journey, but this means that he traveled an entire day. He was not entirely safe in Judah, for Jehoshaphat was in an alliance with Ahab (1 Kings 22:4). The wilderness: See Geographical Notes. Juniper tree: The margin is "broom-tree." Of it Robinson says: "This is the largest and most conspicuous shrub of these deserts, growing thickly in the water courses and valleys. Our Arabs always selected the place of encampment (if possible) in a spot where it grew, in order to be sheltered by it at night from the wind; and during the day, when they often went on in advance of the camels, we found them not infrequently sitting or sleeping under a bush of Retem to protect them from the sun. It was in this very desert, a day's journey from Beersheba, that the prophet Elijah lay down and slept beneath the same shrub." It is enough: This means, "I have lived long enough," as is shown by his reason for his request for death. He did not wish to live longer than his fathers.

under a juniper-tree; and behold, an angel touched him, and said unto him, Arise and eat. 6 And he looked, and, behold, there was at his head a cake baken on the coals, and a cruse of water. And he did eat and drink, and laid him down again. 7 And the angel of Jehovah came again the second time, and touched him, and said, Arise and eat, because the journey is too great for thee. 8 And he arose, and did eat and drink, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights unto Horeb the mount of God.

9 And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word

of Jehovah came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? 10 And he said, I have been very jealous for Jehovah, the God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. 11 And he said, Go forth, and stand upon the mount before Jehovah: And, behold, Jehovah passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains, and brake in pieces the rocks before Jehovah; but Jehovah was not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; but Jehovah was not in

5. Elijah was thoroughly exhausted from the long traveling, the reaction from over-excitement, lack of food, and the depression of the desert.

6. A cake baken on the coals: This does not mean that Elijah saw a fire lighted, with a cake on it, but rather a cake baken in the usual way, that is, on coals or a hot stone.

7. The journey: It is here mentioned for the first time. It is to be understood that Elijah had already made up his mind to go to Horeb before exhaustion overcame him. The angel is not suggesting to him to go, for in that case the question of verse 9 would never have been asked him. He probably hoped that on the same spot where God made a revelation to Moses he would disclose what further steps Elijah should take.

8. In the strength of that food: The writer means that he was miraculously preserved and strengthened. Compare the long fast of Moses on Mt. Sinai (Ex. 34:28) and that of Jesus (Matt. 4:2). Forty days and forty nights: The distance from Beersheba to Horeb is not more than two hundred miles. Robinson left the later place on March 29, made a detour to the gulf of Akabah and

reached Beersheba on April 12. Elijah ought to have reached the mountain within six or seven days. Part of the time must have been spent in wandering through the desert. Horeb the mount of God: See Geographical Notes. It is called the Mount of God in Ex. 3:1. The reason is, because God gave the law to Israel from this mountain.

9. A cave: The Hebrew has "the cave," some well known cave being intended. Many commentators have conjectured that the identical cave in which Moses was hidden while the Lord passed by is meant (Ex. 33:22). Lodged: Literally, "spent the night." What doest thou here, Elijah? No censure for his flight is intended in the question. It was designed to give the prophet an opportunity to pour out the sorrow of his heart.

10. The children of Israel: He makes no complaint against the king or queen, but against the people only. "He pleadeth with God against Israel" (Rom. 11:2). The counts in his indictment are (1) Broken the covenant, (2) thrown down the altars, (3) slain the prophets, and (4) seek his life.

11. Go forth: This Elijah did not do

the earthquake: 12 and after the earthquake a fire; but Jehovah was not in the fire: and after the fire a still small voice. 13 And it was so, when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood in the entrance of the cave. And, behold, there came a voice unto him, and said, What doest thou here, Elijah? 14 And he said, I have been very jealous for Jehovah, the God of hosts; for the children of Israel have forsaken thy cove-

nant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, even I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away.

15 And Jehovah said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, thou shalt anoint Hazael to be king over Syria; 16 and Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel; and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmehoiah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room.

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at once, but after the breeze. Cf. ver. 13. Jehovah passed by: How could this be if Elijah had not yet gone out from the cave? This difficulty is best gotten rid of by translating it as a part of the speech to Elijah. It would then be: "Behold, Jehovah is about to pass by." The Hebrew permits of this translation. The Septuagint so translates it. Jehovah was about to reveal himself to the prophet.

12. A still small voice: See the margin: "A sound of gentle stillness."

13. Wrapped his face in his mantle: Out of reverence, as did Moses (Ex. 3: 6), and the seraphim (Is. 6:2). The garment used was his cloak or outer coat. The prophet is conscious of the presence of God in the voice, which was absent in the other phenomena. What doest thou here, Elijah? This repeated question means: "Have you any reason for staying here further than the one given before?"

14. Elijah has not yet been moved by the divine manifestations. He has the same opinion that he had before. He repeats his former reason. All of this makes it probable that Elijah did not understand the vision.

15. It was common with later prophets (Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Zechariah) for God to give them a sensible sign or

symbol and then explain this in words. This is what he does in this instance. Since this has to do with Elijah's actions, the verbal explanation consists in instruction as to a course of action. Anoint Hazael: There is considerable difficulty in the fact that we have no account of Elijah ever being in Damascus, nor of his anointing Hazael. Hazael seems never to have been anointed by any one. See 2 Kings 8:7-15. The Bible gives us no clue for the explanation of this difficulty. Jehu, the son of Nimshi: He was really the grandson of Nimshi. His father's name was Jehoshaphat (2 Kings 9:2, 14).

16. Anoint to be king over Israel: Elijah did not, in person, at least, fulfill this commandment. Jehu was anointed after the time of Elijah by an unnamed prophet sent by Elisha (2 Kings 9:1-13). This difficulty is not explained. It is generally assumed that Elijah instructed Elisha, and at the proper time he sent the prophet to anoint Jehu. Hence Elijah did this through another. Elisha: Nor did Elijah literally anoint him. See verse 20.

17. Sword of Hazael: See 2 Kings 8:28, 29; 10:32, 33; 13:3. Sword of Jehu: See 2 Kings 9:24-33; 10:1-7; 18-25. Shall Elisha slay: Elisha slew no one. He did not, like Elijah, attempt

to execute God's punishment on the wicked. The word "slay" must here be used in a figurative sense, as in Hosea 6:5; Is. 11:4.

18. Yet will I leave: That is, seven thousand faithful ones shall survive the persecutions of Ahab and Jezebel. This flatly contradicts Elijah's belief that he was the only servant of Jehovah surviving.

19. Plowing with twelve yoke before him: There were twelve plows, with a yoke to each. Elisha was with the last. This shows that he belonged to a family of some wealth. **Cast his mantle upon him:** The significance of this action is not explained here or elsewhere, but Elisha seems to have had no difficulty in understanding it. He construed it to mean that he was summoned to help Elijah in his work.

20. Ran after Elijah: After throwing his mantle on the younger prophet, Elijah strode on. After a moment of astonishment Elisha runs after him. Go

back again: Elijah grants the request to bid farewell to his family. This is not to be construed as a parallel to Luke 9:61, 62, nor are we to regard it as a sign of wavering on Elisha's part. Elisha makes a natural request which Elijah grants. **For what have I done to thee?** This is best taken as a reason why Elisha should return to kiss his parents. The meaning of Elijah's speech is: "Go back and bid your parents farewell, for my act means that you are to follow me, and since you are no longer to live with them you should bid them an affectionate farewell."

21. Instruments of the oxen: The use of these denoted his haste and the relinquishment of his farming life. **Gave unto the people and they did eat:** This was not a religious act, but a social farewell feast. No altar is mentioned. **Ministered unto him:** He was henceforth known as an attendant of Elijah. He is described as one "who poured water on the hands of Elijah" (2 Kings 3:11).

COMMENTS.

Jezebel's Character. (v. 2.) In no incident of her life is Jezebel's imperious and fanatical character more unmistakably revealed. Such a catastrophe would have shaken a less resolute spirit. Had she yielded, probably the worship of Baal would have ceased. It is not probable that the worship of Jehovah would have been restored even if Jezebel's opposition had been removed, for Elijah's reform did not have the elements of permanent success in it. It was not based on a thorough indoctrination of the people, but on the effect of a spectacular demonstration of power. But speculation as to the effect of Jezebel's acquiescence in the verdict of the people is idle. She did not acquiesce. Her confidence in the rightness of her cause seems not to have been shaken.

She was the true daughter of a priest, fanatical and devoted to her gods. She was also a true daughter of a king, imperious and willing to brook no opposition. She swears by the name of the very gods that have been discredited that the one who has sought their undoing shall himself be undone. In her, therefore, we see one of the main reasons for the failure of Elijah's campaign. She was strong-minded and resourceful enough to dominate the people and snatch victory for her ignoble cause out of the very face of defeat.

Elijah's Flight. (v. 3.) It is generally assumed that Elijah fled because of fear of Jezebel, and it must be admitted that the context strongly favors this view. Furthermore, this is then used either to prove a weakness of the proph-

et hidden hitherto or the strength and influence of woman. A careful study of the circumstances, however, will show that the threat of Jezebel was not the sole reason Elijah had for flight. In the first place, such periods of excitement as the prophet passed through on Carmel are always followed by a reaction, and the depression is apt to be just as low as the previous elation. Elijah under the broom-tree of the desert exhibits all marks of such a reaction. The first reason for his flight, therefore, was physical reaction from over-excitement. This was strong enough and impelling enough to lead us to suspect that Elijah would have withdrawn for just such a period of isolation even if Jezebel had not threatened him. Another cause for his flight would be the absence of proof that he had made a deep impression upon the people. There are reasons for believing that the contest on Carmel was Elijah's own plan. God teaches him at Horeb that this is not the divine way of working in human lives. The prophet had hoped for great things from his victory over the prophets of Baal. It required but a few hours, however, to convince him that his expectations were doomed to disappointment. The king did not interfere with the slaughter of the prophets, yet he did not renounce their god. Jezebel was openly defiant. The people scattered to their homes, elated at the rain, but without words of appreciation for the prophet or thanks to his God. What is more natural, under these circumstances, than that harassing doubts should arise in the prophet's mind and that he should begin to have misgivings as to whether he had acted wisely or not? Every circumstance of the past that could shake his confidence would arise vividly before him. While he was in this frame of mind Jezebel's message came, and this made his burden intolerable. He forsook all and fled. "The smelter of Is-

rael must be content to go down now himself into the crucible."

No Abandonment of Faith. (vs. 3-10.) Elijah's flight must not be thought of as a loss of faith in God. No word that came from his mouth would lead us to think that he lost confidence, or even hope, in the divine power. He has lost confidence in himself and in the people. He indicts the people of utterly forsaking God. He loses all trust in his own carefully wrought-out plan. When he looks manward there is no promise, nor ground of hope. Yet he does not distrust God. By some other instrument, no doubt, and through some other nation, God may work out his plan. His frame of mind is not unlike that of his spiritual namesake. "Art thou he that cometh, or look we for another?" (Matt. 11:2). All of this gives point to James' characterization of him as a man of "like passions with us" (5:17).

God's Method in Human History. (vs. 11, 12.) That these manifestations were to teach Elijah a lesson is evident. That they were designed to instruct the prophet on the divine method of operation is likewise clear. We may also well regard this lesson as the central truth and most important piece of instruction to be found in the passage. These two verses are the kernel of the 19th chapter. The truth intended to be taught is thus expressed by Keil: "Storm, earthquake and fire are the symbols of the divine punishments exterminating the ungodly. God is not in the storm, not in the earthquake, not in the fire to show that his sway in the theocracy is not implacable, annihilating vigor and all-consuming jealousy. Jehovah appears in the sound of a gentle blowing or soft murmur—the sign of the nearness of God (Job 4:16)—which is the love that endures the sinner with sparing mildness, with patience and long-suffering, and delays the punishment as long

as mercy is possible." God seeks to accomplish his purpose in man, not by the spectacular, not by coercion, not by the exhibition of his omnipotence. As the prophet expresses it, God's reformation in the lives of men comes "not by might nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6). This taught him and it teaches us the wisdom of patience. God has for himself a remnant, a seven thousand, and in ways that do not attract our attention he lifts these upward in the scale of truth and righteousness. This is the true method of reform. By education, by that which gradually uplifts, by that which appeals to the motives and will of mankind is true regeneration to be wrought in man.

God's Remedy for Discouragement. (vs. 15-17.) God does not unfold to the prophet all of the details of that method by which he is to accomplish his divine task. He gives to him one truth only. The Lord works by means of silence and not through that which crushes and mangles. Further revelation than this

God does not make to his servant. But he sets him to a task which will occupy his mind and will unfold to him the truth that God has not abandoned Israel. From many directions influences are being set on foot which will gradually turn them toward God. A foreign power is to hamper this material progress and so teach them to trust in Jehovah. A rival king is being trained that will overthrow the idolatrous house of Ahab. A new prophet will carry on the work of Elijah. The future is full of activity and promise. In our effort to find a way of explaining the difficulty in the fact that Elijah did not literally obey a single one of these three commands, we miss the truth. God's design was to show Elijah that he was mistaken in saying, "I, even I only, am left." There were other servants working, it might be unconsciously, for the Lord. They did not need a literal anointing, but Elijah could help them and direct them; and this he was commissioned to do. In addition to these three there are seven thousand that are the Lord's own.

LESSON STORY.

After the stirring events of Mount Carmel Ahab received word from Elijah: "Get thee up, eat and drink, for there is sound of abundance of rain." The prophet then ascends to the summit of the mountain and prostrates himself upon the earth in prayer. As he prays his servant is to look out toward the sea and watch for some sign that Elijah's prayer is heard. On saying "there is nothing," he is charged to go again seven times. At last, at the seventh time, with joy he sees a little cloud, as small as a man's hand, rising out of the sea. It is enough to assure that the prayer of faith is answered, and Elijah's servant is sent to warn Ahab of the coming storm. The king hastens to make ready his chariot and get down from the moun-

tain. Elijah, running before, accompanies Ahab as far as the entrance of Jezreel, and then they separate. Far better for Ahab had he remained with the prophet, or at least constrained him to enter his palace and there abide; for no sooner is he parted from him and again under the evil influence of Jezebel than every good resolution is swept away. He tells her of all that Elijah had done upon Mount Carmel. The queen, enraged, declares with an oath that the prophet's life shall be as the life of one of the priests of Baal before the end of another day. No sooner does her threat reach Elijah than he flees for his life, nor pauses in his flight until a distance of nearly one hundred miles separates him from the angry queen.

The strenuous journey ends at Beersheba, where, leaving his servant, he goes himself, alone, a day's journey into the wilderness. At last, weary and dispirited, he sits down under a juniper tree, and, giving himself to melancholy, asks to die. Although fleeing for his life, yet he strangely thinks himself willing to die. We must not forget that Elijah is, after all, quite human (Jas. 5:17, 18).—The prophet's reaction is largely physical. He is weary from his long journey, faint from the sun's scorching heat and exhausted for want of food. He is sad, also, because his cherished work seems to be ending in failure. His lament, "I am no better than my fathers," reveals the hopes Elijah had formed as to the result of his mission and his bitter disappointment at its apparent failure. Like his fathers he had sought to restore the worship of Jehovah, yet in spite of the victory of Mount Carmel the influence of Jezebel remained unbroken, and at the thought of this the prophet longs to die. Elijah has reached his darkest hour. Yet He who "giveth his beloved sleep" will now use this natural means to restore his fainting servant. As he sleeps an angel touches him, saying, "Arise and eat." Before him is a cake "baken on the coals" and a cruse of water, having partaken of which he falls again into a restful slumber. The prophet is again awakened by the ministering angel and urged to take more food, or the journey will be too great for him. Thus, being refreshed, he starts upon the long journey. Forty days are spent in going from Beersheba to Horeb, and through them all the prophet is divinely strengthened. His journey ends at the entrance of a cave, where he lodges for the night. The Lord speaks, asking him, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" The prophet answers that he has been very jealous for Jehovah,

Israel has forsaken his covenant and he alone is left to defend his worship.

Then a great and strong wind passed by, and after the wind comes an earthquake, and after the earthquake a fire; but in none of these does God reveal himself to the prophet. At last comes the "still small voice," in which Elijah recognized the Divine presence, and, wrapping his face in his mantle, in reverent awe he stands at the entrance of the cave to await Jehovah's further teaching.

Again the question comes, "What doest thou here, Elijah?" And the prophet repeats that he has been very jealous for the Lord, and that he stands alone in striving to restore his worship. The man of God is then commanded to return on his way to the wilderness of Damascus and anoint Hazael to be king of Syria, Jehu to be king over Israel, and Elisha to be prophet in his stead.

Best of all, in answer to his complaint that he only was left, he is told that there are still seven thousand in Israel who have not bowed the knee to Baal. At last the prophet has learned the lesson of his life—the lesson of humility—and goes in lowly obedience to seek Elisha, his successor. He finds him plowing, and significantly casts his mantle upon him. Elisha, sacrificing the oxen and giving himself also to Jehovah, then loyally follows the great prophet. Elijah has been spoken of as a superb soul, learning slowly that the kingdom of heaven is to be received as a little child. Every stage of his course is an humbling stage. Every morning of hope is followed by a night of despair. The course of the prophet is a gradual subsiding from the roar into the whisper, and the process reaches its climax in the scene at Horeb. It is there that the old Elijah is lost in the new. The still small voice had triumphed over the wind, the earthquake and the fire.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. To whom and by whom was the Golden Text of our last lesson spoken?
2. What did it indicate as to the responsibility, time and importance of making choice in religion?
3. What persons are introduced in the course of the last lesson?
4. What reason or reasons can you suggest for calling the assembly to meet on Mount Carmel? (See Geographical Notes.)
5. What memorable test was made on Mount Carmel?
6. On what principle was the execution of the prophets of Baal justified? (See Lesson Story.)
7. What did Jesus do to James and John when they wished to bring fire down from heaven to consume the Samaritans who would not receive him? (Luke 9:55; 2 Kings 1.)

HELPFUL QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLICAL ANSWERS.

1. Immediately after the slaying of the prophets what did Elijah announce to Ahab? 1 Kings 18:41.
2. Where then did Ahab and the prophet Elijah go? 1 Kings 18:41.
3. What command did Elijah give to his servant? 1 Kings 18:43.
4. What indications can you point out of Elijah's faith at this time? 1 Kings 18:41, 43, 44.
5. Describe the rising clouds. 1 Kings 18:44, 45.
6. Where did Ahab and Elijah go and how did they travel? 1 Kings 18:45, 46.
7. What did king Ahab tell Jezebel upon his arrival at Jezreel? 1 Kings 19:1.
8. What immediate effect did it have upon her and upon Elijah? 1 Kings 19:2.
9. Where did Elijah go and what four things did he do? 1 Kings 19:3, 4.
10. What strange and unwarranted prayer did Elijah offer? 1 Kings 19:4.
11. What two special and essential benefits were granted to him under the juniper tree? 1 Kings 19:5-8.
12. To what place did he journey next and what made it historic? 1 Kings 19:8; Ex. 3:1-4.
13. Describe the dialogue between Jehovah and Elijah at Horeb? 1 Kings 19:9-14.
14. What did God then command him to do? 1 Kings 19:15-17.
15. Describe the meeting of Elijah and Elisha and what each one did? 1 Kings 19:19-21.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

Elijah's faith was regarded because it was founded upon God and his promises.

True faith is simple trust in God, in harmony with his revelation and will.

One may believe falsehood and be injured; believe the truth and be saved.

The one great object of our faith is Christ. We confess our faith in him.

He is our Creed, our Life, our Truth, our Way, our All-in-all.

Our faith may be strong or weak,

great or small as a grain of mustard, but will grow if planted and cultivated.

The one condition of successful prayer as prescribed by our Saviour is that it be offered in his name, or, which is the same, according to his will. John 14:14 and Rom. 8:27; 1 John 5:14, 15.

The destruction of physical life may be necessary to save from moral corruption and ruin.

Even the grandest servants of God are

sometimes disheartened. Life seems to them a riddle or a failure, and they wish God would let them die.

Physical comforts—rest and food—and a new vision of God, his people, and his purpose, revive and strengthen them. His grace is sufficient.

The power of a woman “behind the throne” was more powerful than a man upon the throne.

Cherith, Zarephath, Horeb, were the schools of preparation for Elijah’s high service in Israel. Nazareth, the Wilderness, the Mountain solitude and the

shades of Olivet, were private trysting places for the Father and the Son. We, too, need the “closet” for privacy with Christ. We need the realization, fresh every day, the counsel and the spirit of Christ.

Elijah’s experience shows that the believer is strong only as he is filled with the Spirit or “the hand of the Lord” is upon him.

The practical apostle James draws an encouraging lesson from the example of Elijah, a man of like passions with us. What is it? Jas. 5:17, 18.

ELIJAH MEETS AHAB IN NABOTH'S VINEYARD.

1 Kings 21. (Print 1 Kings 21:11-22.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Take heed, and keep yourselves from covetousness. Luke 12:15.

Memory Verses—17-19. **Suggested Reading**—1 Kings 20. **Time**—This seems to have been within the three years of peace between Ahab and Ben-hadad (1 Kings 22:1). They were just prior to Ahab's death in 904 B. C., hence about 906 B. C. **Persons**—Naboth, Ahab, Jezebel, Elijah, the elders and nobles, and two base men. **Place**—Jezreel.

DAILY READINGS.

Feb. 20.... M—1 Kings 21:1-16—The Coveting of a Weak King.
 Feb. 21.... T—1 Kings 21:17-29 —The King Arraigned by Elijah.
 Feb. 22.... W—2 Kings 9:21-37 —Elijah's Prophecy Fulfilled.
 Feb. 23.... T—Josh. 7:10-26 —The Coveting of Achan.
 Feb. 24.... F—1 Sam. 2:11-25 —The Coveting of Eli's Sons.
 Feb. 25.... S—2 Kings 5:1-27 —The Coveting of Gehazi.
 Feb. 26.... S—1 Tim. 6:1-19 —The Sin of Covetousness.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Jezreel. This city seems to have been selected by Ahab as a place of residence, though the seat of government remained at Samaria. (1 Kings 18:45; 21:1). It takes its name from the valley of the same name. The valley, or Plain of Jezreel, is the eastern extension of the Plain of Esdraelon, and connects it with the valley of the Jordan. There is no mention of the city until the time of Ahab. The earliest reference to it in the Scriptures is that statement that Ahab fled from Carmel to Jezreel. When Ben-hadad invaded the land he invested Samaria, but in times of peace and quiet Ahab resided in Jezreel. The former was therefore the seat of government and the military stronghold, while the latter was a place of royal residence only. The city was delightfully situated on a spur of Mount Gilboa, which juts out into the plain. From this headland, two hundred feet above the plain, a splendid view may be had of the hills of southern Galilee and

of northern Samaria and of all Esdraelon; and this view, combined with the fertility of the gardens and the temperate climate in winter, was Ahab's reason for selecting it as his capital. There should be added to these one other fact which contributed greatly to Jezreel's importance. It lay upon the great highway of commerce between the two great centers of civilization of that day—the valleys of the Nile and Euphrates. Every caravan from Egypt would follow the coast to a point south of Carmel, where it would turn eastward through the lower hills of Samaria into the Plain of Esdraelon. Opposite Jezreel it would choose between two routes, one going to the east and the other to the west of the Sea of Galilee. Every merchant from the Euphrates would traverse this route. Jezreel had many points in its favor. Beauty of scenery, wealth of natural products, the luxury brought by commerce and constant movement all

combined to make it equally as desirable for the royal residence of Ahab as Samaria was advantageously situated for his military stronghold. One thing only

his place seemed to lack, and our present lesson tells at what enormous cost to his honor and his justice Ahab procured this.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

After his return from Mount Horeb, Elijah ceases to be as active as he had been previously. At least he is not so prominent in the history. It must not be thought that he was wholly inactive, but the explanation of the infrequent mention of him is probably to be found in the fact that he had taken to heart the lesson taught him by the Lord at Horeb. In the meantime affairs of an entirely different character were engaging the attention of Ahab. Ben-hadad, the king of Damascus, had succeeded in uniting into a close confederation thirty-two kings, and with the powerful force which was thus placed under his command he overran the territory of Ahab. He even succeeded in shutting Ahab up in his capital, Samaria. The success of the Syrians, however, rendered them careless, and a sudden attack by Ahab resulted in a rout and utter defeat. A year later the war was renewed. Ahab, however, in this and in the previous war had been aided by prophets, and he was prepared for the attack. It may seem somewhat singular that a king so utterly antagonistic to the worship of Jehovah should receive aid from his prophets. But the prophets were patriots, though they interpreted their duty to their country differently. It is true that God had not cast off his people. Ahab defeated the Syrian host, drove it into the town of Aphek, and captured even Ben-hadad himself. "Honor, interest, policy, and respect for the national party and the prophets alike urged Ahab to press his advantage to the uttermost." Instead of securing the most from his opportunity, Ahab on the con-

trary concluded a treaty with Ben-hadad on easy terms, and the latter departed with his person and dignity unharmed and his kingdom intact, to laugh at the weakness of Ahab and quietly to plan his revenge. For this weakness and act of folly Ahab was harshly rebuked by a prophet of Jehovah. Some time passes after this, however, without anything arising to disturb the peace of the land. Prosperity and ease once more blessed Ahab and his kingdom. Ahab availed himself of the opportunity to gratify his love of luxury, and even in time came to the point of planning ways by which he might regain some of the territory which he had lost to Ben-hadad and retrieve his honor which he sullied by foolish clemency. Three years of peace passed by (1 Kings 22:1). At some period during these three years the incident which serves for our present lesson occurred. Ahab had a place in Jezreel. From 2 Kings 9:17-37 it is clear that it was on the eastern side of Jezreel and abutting the city wall (vs. 30, 31). Just beyond, to the eastward, there was a tract of ground belonging to Naboth, and it was planted in vines. Since it was directly in front of the palace, Ahab desired to possess it. But Naboth refused to sell it, and Ahab had no legal right to force it out of his possession (Ez. 46:18). Naboth shows by the language of his answer that he is a worshiper of Jehovah and does not fear to confess his faith in the presence of the king. The law forbade the selling of land in perpetuity (Lev. 25:23-28), and Naboth based his refusal to sell upon this precept. Ahab was intolerant of opposition and he chaffed under the stub-

11 And the men of his city, even the elders and the nobles who dwelt in his city, did as Jezebel had sent unto them, according as it was written in the letters which she had sent unto them. 12 They proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth on high among the people. 13 And the two men, the base fellows, came in and sat before him: and the base fellows bare witness against him, even against Naboth, in the presence of the people, saying, Naboth did curse God and the king. Then they carried him forth out of the city, and stoned him to death with

stones. 14 Then they sent to Jezebel, saying, Naboth is stoned, and is dead. 15 And it came to pass, when Jezebel heard that Naboth was stoned, and was dead, that Jezebel said to Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, which he refused to give thee for money; for Naboth is not alive, but dead. 16 And it came to pass, when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that Ahab rose up to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite, to take possession of it.

born refusal of Naboth. But Jezebel was equal to the emergency and was without scruples. She wrote letters in Ahab's name, and to them attached his official seal or signature, and dispatched them to the elders and nobles of Jezreel. In these she gave instruction to proclaim a fast and bring Naboth before the assembly. This fast and public arraignment of Naboth was both hypocritical and virtually prejudged him in order to turn

popular prejudice against him. She further instructs that hired perjurers are to be secured who will accuse Naboth of renouncing God and the king. She makes no other inference than that he will be found guilty by the subservient assembly, and adds as the finishing touch to her instruction that he be put to death. Our lesson begins with the account of the carrying into effect of this infamous royal decree.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 11. The men of his city: Naboth's city, Jezreel. **The elders and the nobles:** They constituted the body that governed the city in local affairs. See Deut. 16:18. **Did as Jezebel had sent:** Their ready compliance with her commands shows deep moral degradation. This was the fruit of idolatry.

12. Proclaimed a fast: Pretending to be in deep humility and shame at the enormity of Naboth's crime. There is no clearer instance known of thorough-going hypocrisy. **Set Naboth on high:** This does not mean to place him in a position of honor, but to place him conspicuously in the assembly

13. The two men: The law required two witnesses for conviction of a capital offense (Deut 17:6; 19:15). In this respect at least they were in accord with

the law. **Naboth did curse God and the king:** This was pure fabrication. **Stoned him to death:** In 2 Kings 9:26 we are informed that sons were stoned to death with Naboth. The pretext for this was that in accord with the eastern and ancient custom, they shared in their father's guilt. Cf. Josh. 7:24, 25. The real motive, however, was to get rid of claimants of the property, for they, too, must be destroyed to secure the vineyard.

14. Sent to Jezebel: From the repetition in verses 8 and 11 of the statement that Jezreel was Naboth's city, it is probable that the king and queen were at that time in Samaria

15. The Jewish Rabbins explain that the property of offenders against the majesty of the king passed to the king. Jez-

17 And the word of Jehovah came to Elijah the Tishbite, saying, 18 Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who dwelleth in Samaria: behold, he is in the vineyard of Naboth, whither he is gone down to take possession of it. 19 And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith Jehovah, Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? And thou shalt speak unto him, saying, Thus saith Jehovah, In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. 20 And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O

mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee, because thou hast sold thyself to do that which is evil in the sight of Jehovah. 21 Behold, I will bring evil upon thee, and will utterly sweep thee away and will cut off from Ahab every man-child, and him that is shut up and him that is left at large in Israel: 22 and I will make thy house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Thijah for the provocation wherewith thou hast provoked me to anger, and hast made Israel to sin.

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ebel's language seems to imply this. David disposed of Mephibosheth's property when he believed him a traitor (2 Sam. 16:4).

18. **Go down:** We are not informed where Elijah was. The word "down" indicates that he came from a higher region. **Who dwelleth in Samaria:** Some commentators have made considerable difficulty over this statement. They suppose that the vineyard must have been near Samaria instead of Jezreel, and the Septuagint omits from verse 1 the statement that it was in Jezreel. We have already observed (v. 14) that Ahab was probably in Samaria, from whence he went to Jezreel.

19. **Hast . . . also taken possession:** This he did the very next day after Naboth's execution (2 Kings 9:26). The haste gave added point to Elijah's rebuke. He, rather than Jezebel, is rebuked because he was equally guilty and he reaped the benefit. **In the place:** Two facts

are predicted: (1) Dogs shall lick Ahab's blood, (2) In the very place where Naboth's blood was shed. The severity of this was somewhat abated on account of Ahab's repentance (v. 29). Dogs did lick his blood, though not on the exact spot (1 Kings 22:38). His son Jehoram was slain on this very plot of ground (2 Kings 9:25, 26).

20. **O mine enemy:** "Ahab seeks to justify himself by attributing personal enmity upon the prophet's part toward himself" (Von Gerlach). **Hast sold thyself:** As men sold themselves into slavery, so had Ahab sold himself into the bondage of sin. Cf. Romans 7:14. It means that he had abandoned himself entirely to sin.

21. **Evil upon thee:** Part of this punishment was personal, and part came upon Ahab's family.

22. **House of Jeroboam:** For its fate see 1 Kings 15:29. **House of Baasha:** See 1 Kings 16:11.

COMMENTS.

The Significance of this Incident. The affair of Naboth and his vineyard gave Elijah the occasion to present himself before us in a somewhat different attitude. It gives us the opportunity to view him from the aspect of his rela-

tion to the social life of the nation. Yet it is not to be thought of as an isolated incident in his or in the lives of the prophets in general. It is in perfect keeping with the activity of the prophets of the eighth and succeeding cen-

turies. The task of the prophets may be defined either negatively or positively. Positively it was to turn men to the worship of Jehovah with all that is implied in this worship. But before this was done their negative work must be performed (Jer. 1:10). This negative work consisted of two tasks. The first was to break down all idolatry and false worship. The second was to root out immorality. Not until these were accomplished could they hope to establish thoroughly the worship of Jehovah. Up to the present, Elijah has appeared as the opponent of idolatry. Now we learn that he set his face as strongly against the unrighteousness of Ahab as he did against his religious errors. It rounds out the character of the prophet and shows that in his zeal for Jehovah he was not thinking of the cultus alone, but regarded truth, honesty and justice as of equal importance with the altar. In fact we may say of more importance, for the purpose of the altar is to produce morality, and unless it does this it is a menace and not a blessing. Isaiah is full of scorn for those who trample God's temple courts in their punctilious worship, and yet have hands that are filled with blood. His command for those who would worship God is to "Seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." (Is. 1:10-17.) Micah, too, preaches the same gospel. "What doth Jehovah require of thee but to do justly and to love kindness and to walk humbly with thy God?" (Mic. 6:8.) In fact all of the prophets lay great emphasis upon the duty of living honest lives, clean lives, just lives and merciful lives. Without these there can be no worship of Jehovah.

Social Aspect of this Incident. Elijah does not preach merely a general doctrine of morality. He does not say to the king, "You should avoid evil and do

good," and then leave Ahab to define good and evil in the ways that seemed satisfactory to him. When Elijah said to Ahab, "You have sold yourself to do evil," this word "evil" had for him a very definite and concrete meaning. It was wrong to his subject, injustice done by a stronger to a weaker man. Elijah appears as a representative of the people, an advocate from them in their wrongs. Ahab's was an upstart government that had its origin in a protest against oppression, and now it, in turn, is oppressing and working injustice far more galling than that of Solomon. The prophet speaks on behalf of the people. He is a defender of popular rights. Every wrong done them is in his eyes a sin against God as well as man. Ahab looked upon him as one who was given to interfering with affairs of government and called him his enemy. His feelings were probably closely akin to those of the magnate or the politician who finds himself interfered with by someone who preaches the doctrine of human rights and social justice. Elijah was from one aspect, something of a socialist; he was opposing existing forms and institutions. From another he was something of a labor agitator; he stood for the small farmer against the powerful rich. He was also something of a demagogue; he believed in the rights of the people. Yet, whatever he was, he arrived at his conclusion because he believed in God and that God was for the right and against the wrong. In this, too, Elijah was in accord with the prophets that came after him. Almost every one of the earlier ones at least condemn the greed and oppression of the rich and deplore the sufferings of the poor. Amos condemned this same nation because it "sold the righteous for silver, and the needy for a pair of shoes" (2:6). Hosea found in his generation "nought but swearing and breaking faith and killing and stealing and committing adultery; they

break out and blood touches blood" (4:2). In Isaiah's time "every one loveth bribes, and followeth rewards; they judge not the fatherless, neither doth the cause of the wi'ow come unto them" (1:23). How close to our own age does this message of Elijah and the other prophets come!

The Ruin of Ahab's House. In this incident we find the real cause for the fall

cred historian agrees with him in this view of it. It led to the fall of Ahab's house (2 Kings 9:25, 26), and Jezebel's death (2 Kings 9:37).

The Character of the Royal Couple. In this lesson both Ahab and Jezebel come forth from their obscurity and we may get a better insight into their character than has been afforded us previously. "If Ahab has shown himself, thus far, to be



THE SITE OF ANCIENT JEZREEL.

of Ahab's dynasty. His idolatry contributed its part. It hung like a pall of doom over his house from the beginning, but the avenging justice of God waits for some appalling act which will fill to the brim his cup of iniquity. This act is his sin against Naboth, and this was the cause of his ruin. The wars with Ben-hadad present the occasion, and in one of these he fell (22:35), but back of the war of kings and other earthly affairs is the eternal God who makes for righteousness. Elijah sees in Ahab's crime against Naboth a sentence to doom pronounced against the king, and the sa-

a weak man, destitute of any religious and moral firmness, and subject to every evil influence, here this is the case so conspicuously that from feebleness and want of character he becomes a common criminal. He did not know how to devote the time of peace, after the severe pressure caused by the Syrians, to anything except to be thinking of the enlargement and beautifying of his pleasure garden . . . a sign that all the great experiences of his life, even the last sharp threatening at the releasing of Ben-hadad, had made no impression upon him. The refusal of Naboth to cede

to him his vineyard makes him angry, and excites him, but he has not force enough to make use of his mettle, and so he betakes himself to his bed, will not eat, nor see any person, and behaves like a spoiled, ill-mannered child which has been refused a toy. It was necessary for his wife to supply him with spirit, and to remind him that he must be a man and king. He does not interfere himself, but allows her to arrange the matter, and gives her the insignia of his royal authority, unconcerned how she may use it; or, as it almost seems, he enters into her criminal designs. When the infamous transaction was done, and she told him of it, he was not shocked; he was rather visibly pleased and satisfied (Josephus has it: "He sprang up from his bed with delight"), and he made haste to take possession of the property stolen and stained with blood. This blood-guiltiness rested upon him, so that the prophet could, with all propriety, call him both a murderer and a thief. In respect to Queen Jezebel, who has hitherto been portrayed only

on the side of her wild fanaticism for the unchaste Baal and Astarte worship, she shows herself here in her complete moral depravity. We discover in her no trace of the feebleness and want of energy which characterized her husband. Her deepest traits were pride and a desire for dominion, to gratify which she shrank back from no instrumentality. Under the show and pretext of serving her husband and fulfilling his wishes, she knew how to govern him and to appropriate to herself the royal authority. She did not look at the monarchy according to the Israelitish sense, as the institution which was designed to carry out the law and will of Jehovah, but as the absolute authority over the property and lives of the subjects. Every refusal to fulfill a royal wish, though it had been grounded in the divine law was, in her eyes, *lese-majests*—yes, as blasphemy against God, because she wished the king to be considered, not as the servant, but as the representative of Deity." (Lange).

LESSON STORY.

A great change has been wrought in Elijah through the "still small voice" at Horeb. Companionship with the gentler and more patient prophet has also had its effect in softening his stern, imperious nature. After appointing Elisha to succeed him, both retire into the wilderness of Damascus, where years are spent in comparative obscurity. They are not, however, idle years. We may infer, from scattered hints, that during this time Elijah busied himself in reorganizing the schools of the prophets located at Bethel, Gilgal and Jericho. These schools, started in the days of Samuel, had been broken up through the persecutions of Jezebel. In his efforts to restore them Elijah was learning that the still small voice of truth, uttered

from house to house, or spoken now and then in the ears of kings, was to be a greater power for good among the people than all the fierce judgments upon which he had hitherto depended. For this reason Elijah, we may suppose, gave much time to the training of a company of prophets, who, after his departure, should teach to the people the law of the Lord and rebuke sin, wherever found.

For six years he has found a helper in Elisha. Elijah, zealous, strong and brave and Elisha, patient, gentle and sympathetic—each finding in the other that which was lacking in himself—grew into the strongest and most helpful friendship, as true as that of Jonathan and David.

Although Elijah's life is now, for the

most part, a hidden one, yet when some great evil threatens, or crime has been committed, he still flames out "like a meteor, portending ruin to the guilty." News has reached him, in his lonely retreat, of an atrocious act of robbery and murder, and he goes forth to pronounce upon it an awful retribution, such a retribution as not even Baal worship had called forth. The crime had been done by Ahab through his accomplice, Jezebel, and the scene of its occurrence was Jezreel.

Here Ahab had built for himself a magnificent ivory palace which, fanned by the breezes from the great Mediterranean, was to be his summer home. All about it were lovely vineyards, and close by it was one of especial richness and beauty, the property of the good man Naboth. The king, looking upon it, coveted it and resolved to do his utmost to possess it.

It seemed to him that no other ground would suit so well for his palace garden. No time was lost in seeking Naboth and in making him an offer. He proffered him either a better vineyard in exchange, or its full value in money. To Ahab's chagrin both offers were rejected. Naboth declined to sell the inheritance of his fathers, a sacred trust, even to the willful king. Ahab, returning to his house displeased and sullen, threw himself upon his couch, with his face toward the wall, and refused to eat. While in this bitter mood Jezebel, entering and asking as to the cause of such ill humor, was told of his offer to Naboth and the latter's refusal.

The intrepid queen then makes light of his fret about so small a matter, urges him to eat and promises that she will see that he gets possession of the vineyard. Her plan was to write a letter in the king's name, sealed with his seal, and send it from Samaria to the elders and nobles of Jezreel. The let-

ter should order that a feast be proclaimed, as though to avert some public calamity; that Naboth be made conspicuous in the assembly; that two perjured witnesses be brought in to accuse him of blasphemy against God and the king; that upon their testimony he be condemned, dragged outside the city and be stoned to death.

The elders were prompt to execute her orders, and that night news reached the queen that Naboth was dead. Thereupon the "triumphant sorceress" bids her husband arise and take his vineyard. Early the next morning the king drives in state from Samaria, seven miles, to Jezreel to look upon his coveted prize. In the vineyard he meets Elijah. It has often been the duty of prophets to stand before kings and denounce their wickedness. Thus Moses stood before Pharaoh, Samuel before Saul, Nathan before David, John before Herod, and Paul before Nero. But sacred history does not record that ever upon the ears of any other king have fallen such words of doom. At sight of Elijah, Ahab's hardened conscience softens. He cries in anguish: "Hast thou found me, O, mine enemy?" With steady voice the man of God answers: "I have found thee." At the very entrance to the vineyard, stained by Naboth's blood, he hears from God's messenger of the curse about to fall.

The prophet then pictures each scene of the fearful tragedy soon to be enacted. Ahab is told of the utter extinction of his house, of his own sad fate and of the violent and ignominious death of Jezebel. On account of the burning words he is deeply moved with fear. He rends his garments, puts on sackcloth, fasts and goes "softly." Because of this humbling of himself he is spared the pain of witnessing all the woes that shall fall upon his house. His later conduct shows the shallowness of his repent-

ance. It also illustrates how hard is repentance for one whose whole life has been in opposition to God and conscience. Ahab had truly "sold himself" to do evil, and sold himself for naught. Like Achan coveting the golden wedge and costly garment and perishing with them; or, like Judas, for thirty pieces of sil-

ver selling his Lord, only to cast his treasure upon the temple floor and to hang himself, so Ahab is only tortured at sight of the vineyard purchased at the price of innocent blood.

"The triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the godless is but for a moment" (Job 20:5).

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What was Jezebel's message to Elijah?
2. What naturally would be her feeling after the defeat of Baal, the execution of the priests and the victory of Elijah?
3. How do you account for the prophet's speedy flight and great depression?
4. What did God do to revive Elijah both physically and spiritually?
5. What work had God yet waiting for Elijah to do?

6. What threat did Ben-hadad make to Ahab and what promise did God make to him? 1 Kings 20:1-6 and 20:13.

7. What warning did the prophet give to Ahab after the victory? 1 Kings 20:22.

8. Why was Ahab successful in the second battle? 1 Kings 20:28.

9. What blunder did Ahab commit with Ben-hadad? 1 Kings 20:31-34.

10. What did God say to Ahab, by the prophet, about the error? 1 Kings 20:42, 43.

HELPFUL QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. Who had a vineyard that Ahab wanted and where? 1 Kings 21:1.

2. Why did Ahab want it and why did the owner refuse to part with it? 1 Kings 21:2, 3. (See also Lev. 25:23-28 and Num. 36:7.)

3. Tell what Ahab did when he was refused the vineyard. 1 Kings 21:4.

4. Who came to his assistance and how? 1 Kings 21:5-7.

5. What was her appeal and what did she advise? 1 Kings 21:7.

6. What scheme then did she carry out in Ahab's name? 1 Kings 21:8-10.

7. Were the elders and nobles willing to execute the scheme, and if so, why? 1 Kings 21:11-14.

8. What further counsel did Jezebel give to Ahab after the execution? 1 Kings 21:15.

9. What serious trouble arose because of Ahab's obedience of his wife? 1 Kings 21:17-19.

10. What did Ahab say to Elijah when he met him in the vineyard? 1 Kings 21:20.

11. What was Elijah's answer to the king? 1 Kings 21:20-22.

12. What of Jezebel also was declared by Jehovah? 1 Kings 21:23.

13. How did Ahab's wickedness compare with that of preceding kings? 1 Kings 21:25.

14. What particularly was abominable in God's sight and why? 1 Kings 21:26.

15. What effect did the prophet's words have upon Ahab? 1 Kings 21:27.

16. On account of Ahab's humbling himself what did the Lord tell Elijah he would not do during Ahab's life? 1 Kings 21:28, 29.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

Preliminary questions -- if answered -- will throw light upon this lesson.

"The way of the transgressor is hard." Ahab's life was not happy or successful. Jezebel seems never to have been at peace with herself. Her god was not a god of mercy, but of power--sheer and selfish power. If, as Jesus teaches, a tree is known by its fruits, then idolatry is a bad tree.

The saddest thing about Jezebel was her religion. Ahab, being king, had the power to destroy Naboth for gain, and destroyed him. But the innocent blood of Naboth cried unto God like that of Abel.

Just as the vineyard seemed to be blossoming for the joy of Ahab, the word of Elijah stung him to despair. Many a man builds a mansion only to die in it. Elijah counted for covetous Ahab the overwhelming cost of his vineyard, for which he expected to pay nothing. The broad way narrows as it is trodden. The narrow way widens as it is followed.

The New Testament says "Covetousness . . . is idolatry." Alas! how prevalent the evil and how respectable! Paul was happy to say to the elders of Ephe-

sus: "I coveted no man's silver or gold or apparel?"

Gold and silver have often led through formal marriage to wicked divorce. Many a girl attracted to a lover for his gold has died of a broken heart.

Apparel! Expensive clothing, beautiful adorning, costly ornaments, luxuries demanded by the god of conventionalism, by the Baal of society, have been coveted by many a soul to his undoing.

Many a farmer has added acre to acre at the tremendous cost of a tender conscience and at the expense of his spiritual manhood.

"Little children, keep yourselves from idols."

What the faithful prophet Elijah was to Ahab, the warning gospel is to us. Ahab called him his enemy and the troubler of Israel. So is Jesus the enemy of sin and the tender troubler of sinners. "Hast thou found me?" said Ahab to the friendly prophet. But his sins were his enemies. It was his sin that found him out.

Happy shall we be if Jesus, coming, shall find us in his vineyard, faithful laborers in his name.

Lesson X.

March 5.

ELIJAH GOES UP BY A WHIRLWIND INTO HEAVEN.

2 Kings 2:1-18. (Print 2 Kings 2:1-12.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Enoch walked with God: and he was not; for God took him.
Gen. 5:24.

Memory Verses—11, 12. **Suggested Reading**—2 Kings 1 and 2. **Time**—About 900 B. C. **Persons**—Elijah, Elisha, Sons of the Prophets. **Places**—Gilgal, Bethel, Jericho, Jordan.

DAILY READINGS.

Feb. 27.... M—2 Kings 1:1-18—The Experience of Ahaziah with the Prophet.
Feb. 28.... T—2 Kings 2:1-12—Elijah Carried into Heaven by a Whirlwind.
Mch. 1..... W—2 Kings 2:13-18—The Vain Search for Elijah's Body.
Mch. 2..... T—Gen. 5:21-24; Heb. 11:1-6—Enoch Translated that he Should not see Death.
Mch. 3..... F—Ps. 49:1-15—God will Redeem From the Power of Death.
Mch. 4..... S—Ps. 23:1-6—I will not Fear the Shadow of Death.
Mch. 5..... S—2 Cor. 5:1-10—The House not Made With Hands.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Gilgal. There was a Gilgal that was the site of Israel's first camp after they crossed the Jordan (Josh. 4:19). But this was near Jericho, and can not be the Gilgal of our text, for the prophets, starting from Gilgal, reached Jericho by passing through Bethel (vs. 1, 2, 4). The Gilgal from which Elijah came must have been situated on the highlands of Mount Ephraim; and there is to-day, on the road from Bethel to Shechem, a village bearing the modern name of Jiljilia. It is 2,400 feet above the Mediterranean, and 3,700 feet above the ford of the Jordan at which the prophets crossed. It is rather nearer Bethel than Shechem; so the first stage of the prophet's journey was scarcely more than eight miles.

Bethel. See Geographical Notes on Lesson II. Of the calf worship established by Jeroboam we have no recent mention. Instead Bethel is chosen by the sons of the prophets as one of their places of assembly and probably of habitation.

This was in perfect keeping with the character of the place in earlier times. In the days of Samuel it was a sacred shrine and hither men went to worship (1 Sam. 10:3). The irregular worship of Jeroboam had disappeared as the political situation which had called it into existence changed, and the place had lapsed back into its earlier condition, a sacred spot, holy to those who worshiped Jehovah.

Jericho. The ancient city of Jericho lay in the valley of the Jordan near, however, to the western side. It was five miles from the Dead Sea, and a somewhat shorter distance from the Jordan. It had been destroyed in the time of Joshua, and a curse was pronounced on the man who rebuilt it. In the reign of Ahab, when wickedness flourished, Hiel the Bethelite, restored it and suffered the loss of his oldest and youngest sons. This is the first mention of it since its rebuilding. Sons of the prophets were here as well as in Bethel. In this same

chapter (vs. 19-22) there is an account of Elisha's healing the waters of a spring which then sent and now sends forth an abundance of water into the plain. The

second stage of the journey of Elijah and Elisha, from Bethel to Jericho, was about fifteen miles; and the third, to the Jordan, less than five.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

After Elijah's denunciation of Ahab for his injustice in the affair of Naboth, he appeared in public but once, so far as our source of information tells us. Ahab's son and successor, Ahaziah, fell and was severely injured. True to the idolatry of his parents, he sent messengers to the Baal of the Philistines to inquire whether he should recover. On the way these messengers were met by Elijah and were sent back to the king with the information that in his own land there was a God more powerful than Baal-Zeub. The king sent repeatedly bands of troops to bring the fearless prophet before him, but it was not until the third came that Elijah consented to take his message in person to the son of Ahab. That message was a prediction of his speedy death. Elijah is mentioned in connection with no other public event. How long he lived we are not informed. In the meantime changes have taken place in the throne of both kingdoms. Almost simultaneous with the translation of Elijah was the death of King Jehoshaphat, who was succeeded by his son, Jehoram. Four years before Ahab had died and his son, Ahaziah, came to the throne, but his death followed almost immediately (2 Kings 1). It is probable that he had co-operated with his father in the government for about a year prior to Ahab's death (1 Kings 16:29; 22:51; 2 Kings 3:1). On the death of Ahaziah, his brother, Joram, became king. Wickedness and idolatry flourished, and the closing years of Elijah must have been saddened by the sight of his country plunging deeper and deeper into immorality and the worship of foreign gods.

Sons of the Prophets. In this lesson we have repeated reference to the "sons of the prophets." The first occurrence

of this phrase is in 1 Kings 20:23; and with the exception of this passage and one occurrence in Amos (7:14), it is not found outside of those chapters that give us the history of Elisha (2 Kings 1-9). There is reference to bands of prophets, however, in the history of Samuel, and we are probably warranted in thinking of these as the same, or at least as forerunners of what afterwards came to be known as "sons of the prophets." The rise and nature of this society is a matter of great interest to the student of the Old Testament, and especially to the student of the prophets, but the meagerness of the information baffles anything like a clear and satisfactory understanding of them. Some things may be settled with a fair degree of certainty, however, and these throw an interesting light on the history of the times of Elijah and Elisha. It has generally been assumed by the commentators that these were schools of the prophets—companies of men banded together to receive instruction in the prophetic office. Of this, however, there is no proof. The Bible never speaks of them as schools, and no reference to them suggests the idea of their receiving instruction. At times they seem to have lived together much after the fashion of the monastic orders of Christian times (2 Kings 4:38; 6:1). Some of them, at least, were married and had families (2 Kings 4:1). They were, therefore, not necessarily youths. The description of them as a school or college is probably an error arising from the reading back into primitive times the organizations and customs of society which belong to a much later period. In the times of Samuel they depended much upon physical excitement to work themselves into ecstatic states (1 Sam. 10:10; 19:20). In

1 And it came to pass, when Jehovah would take up Elijah by a whirlwind into heaven, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal. 2 And Elijah said unto Elisha, Tarry here, I pray thee; for

Jehovah hath sent me as far as Beth-el. And Elisha said, as Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they went down to Beth-el.

this respect they were not unlike the dervishes of the East and certain "holiness bands" of the West. They were not looked upon altogether with favor (1 Sam. 10:10), and this reproach continued till the time of Elisha (2 Kings 9:11). In this connection it should be noted that Amos disclaims any connection with them (7:14). There is evidence that there were many men in these bands. The company at Jericho could muster fifty strong men. The one hundred prophets which Obadiah preserved were probably one or more of these bands (1 Kings 18:4). The prophets who gave advice to Ahab and Jehoshaphat numbered four hundred (1 Kings 22:6). They were certainly regarded as prophets of Jehovah (v. 5), and yet their actions go far toward justifying the unfavorable repute in which they were held. By comparing the small army of prophets used in the worship of Baal (1 Kings 18:19), it seems probable that the worshipers of Jehovah were imitating the customs of their idolatrous neighbors. From this examination of

the evidence our conclusion is that the "sons of the prophets" were partly good and partly bad. They had their origin in bands of men who used physical excitement to produce religious enthusiasm. They were popularly regarded as semi-mad men (1 Sam. 10:10; 18:10; 19:24; 2 Kings 9:11). They were not always truthful (1 Kings 22:6ff). Amos disclaimed being one of them (7:14). Elijah seems never to have had any association with them. Later prophets, particularly Micah and Jeremiah, denounced certain prophets which they never describe as idolatrous prophets. On the other hand, Samuel associated with them. From their number were some who set truth above falsehood (1 Kings 22:14, 15), and there were some also who wisely and prudently directed the kings (1 Kings 20:13, 22). They seem to have been societies of men banded together for a common religious life. Much good came from these communities, though, as in the case of all such organizations, evil and abuse were present also.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 1. It came to pass when, etc.: The first half of this verse is a title to the narrative of Elijah's translation. This narrative is introductory to the prophetic career of Elisha. **Elisha went with Elijah:** He is still "ministering to" Elijah (1 Kings 19:21). See 2 Kings 3:11, where it is said that he poured water on the hands of Elijah.

2. Elijah said unto Elisha: It is useless for us to attempt to conjecture what Elijah's motive was. He was no doubt sincere in stating that Elisha should stay

behind, but we do not know for what reason. **Jehovah hath sent me:** This shows that Elijah led him to Bethel and to Jericho. It is also likely that it contained a warning that his end was at hand. We may not be sure that it told him how he was to end his life. We are not told how Elisha and the sons of the prophets came to be informed of this. The old commentators supposed that all three, but independently of each other, had received a divine relation. In the absence of proof of this, it is probable

3 And the sons of the prophets that were at Beth-el came forth to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that Jehovah will take away thy master from thy head to-day? And he said, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. 4 And Elijah said unto him, Elisha, tarry here, I pray thee; for Jehovah hath sent me to Jericho. And he said, As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. So they came to Jericho. 5 And the sons of the prophets that were at Jericho came near to Elisha, and said unto him, Knowest thou that Jehovah will take away thy master from thy head today? And he answered, Yea, I know it; hold ye your peace. 6 And Elijah said unto

him, Tarry here, I pray thee; for Jehovah hath sent me to the Jordan. And he said, As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And they two went on. 7 And fifty men of the sons of the prophets went, and stood over against them afar off; and they two stood by the Jordan. 8 And Elijah took his mantle, and wrapped it together, and smote the waters, and they were divided hither and thither, so that they two went over on dry ground. 9 And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I am taken from thee. And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy

that Elijah told Elisha, and then told the sons of the prophets. As Jehovah, etc.: Elisha's determination is seen in the solemn oath which he makes. Sometimes one clause and sometimes the other is used, but they are combined only when the speaker wishes to make a very earnest assertion. Down: This word shows that the Gilgal from which the prophet came can not be the Gilgal near Jericho. See Geographical Notes.

3. Sons of the prophets: See Introduction. Came forth to Elisha: The fact that they came to Elisha alone, and not to Elijah also, is best explained by the supposition that Elijah, without Elisha, had entered into their building and held conversation with them. In the course of this he told them that his end was at hand. Thy master from thy head: This shows the relation between the two men. Elisha was not merely a successor of Elijah (1 Kings 19:16); he had been his servant and spiritual son (ver. 12). Hold your peace: This was not intended to be a rude speech, but an intimation that he did not wish to be disturbed. It was too sacred for words.

7. Stood over against them afar off:

The Jordan is almost five miles from Jericho, but just to the west of the town is a high hill from which they could view all of the course to the river and for miles beyond. It was here, probably, that they stood, though it seems that they did not see the disappearance of Elijah. See verse 15.

8. Mantle: This and the "girdle of leather" (2 Kings 4:8) were the conspicuous features of Elijah's dress. Wrapped together: More exactly, "rolled it up," so it would resemble a rod. They were divided hither and thither: As the Red Sea was divided (Ez. 14:21) and the waters of the Jordan near to this place (Josh. 3:13).

9. Ask what I shall do for thee: Elisha looks upon Elijah as a father, and probably this feeling was reciprocated. Then this would be a call for the son to make his last request of a spiritual father. A double portion of thy spirit: This does not mean twice as much spirit (power) as you possess, but such a portion as an elder son would receive. Cf. Deut. 21:17. Elisha is modest, and yet he asks that the adoption of him which Elijah made be sealed by allow-

spirit be upon me. **10** And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: *nevertheless*, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so. **11** And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, *there appeared* a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, which parted

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them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven. **12** And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof!

And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.

ing him to be recognized as Elijah's spiritual eldest born.

10. A hard thing: Because Elijah had no power to grant it. This was for God only to bestow. If thou see me, etc.: His presence at the end and his witnessing the translation were to be accepted as a sign that God had granted his prayer.

11. And talked: It should be noted that this is now mentioned for the first time. The text gives the impression that Elijah was wrapt in silence till Jordan was passed. **Chariot of fire and horses of fire:** The manifestation of God's presence and also symbolical of Elijah's character and work for Israel (v. 12). **Parted them asunder:** This was the purpose of the chariot and horses. Eli-

jah went up by a whirlwind: It should be noted that the text does not say Elijah rode in the fiery chariot, as the pictures always represent this scene. He was taken up by a whirlwind. Into heaven: More properly, "heavenward," or "toward heaven." Heaven here means the sky, or upper air. Nothing is here said as to what became of Elijah.

12. Elisha saw it: Elijah miraculously carried away. This was the proof to Elisha that he was to receive a double portion of Elijah's spirit (v. 10). **My father:** Elisha's conception of what Elijah had been to him, a spiritual father. **The chariots, etc.:** His conception of what Elijah had been to Israel—its real strength and protection.

COMMENTS.

The Close of a Unique Career. The end of Elijah's life and labors was appropriate as the close of a striking and unique career. He appears in the beginning, Melchizedek-like, without previous explanation or announcement. This characteristic of him continued throughout his life. He appeared suddenly and unexpectedly to Obabiah. Suddenness was the characteristic of the man. In perfect keeping with this character he now ends his career without lingering illness or natural death. He is known as the prophet of fire, and the whirlwind and the fire are the attendants of his departure.

Elisha's Constancy. Few men have been blessed with such constant and devoted helpers as Elisha proved himself to be to Elijah. His original call seems to have signified an adoption to sonship. To this Elisha responded by ministering unto Elijah (1 Kings 19:21). So attentive was he in doing this that he came to be known as the personal attendant of the older prophet (2 Kings 3:11). His constancy remains to the end. He will not leave the master whom he has served, and he asks for himself no higher honor than that he may be chosen as Elijah's spiritual oldest born.

Comparison of Elijah and Elisha.

(v. 9.) The interpretation of Elisha's request as a petition that he might have twice as much spirit (power) as Elijah has led the commentators to make comparison between the two prophets. They have then sought to prove that the requested was granted by a demonstration of Elisha's superiority. In some cases

4:27." (Bible Commentary.) Both of the prophets were great in their own sphere, but their characteristics are strikingly different. When it came to permanent effect it is probable that Elisha achieved more than Elijah. The explanation of this is that he worked more in accordance with the method which God com-



THE FORD OF THE JORDAN.

they actually sought to prove that Elisha had twice the miraculous power of Elijah. Of course such an effort is foredoomed to failure. Elijah is much the more striking figure. He has seized the fancy of men more thoroughly than Elisha. He is referred to far more than Elisha. "While Elijah is mentioned in Chronicles, in Malachi, in every Gospel repeatedly, in the epistle to the Romans and in the epistle of James, Elisha's name occurs—out of Kings—but once in the whole of the rest of the Scriptures, Lukefire, and he seems a stern embodiment of

mended on Mount Horeb. Then he worked with men and did not disdain the attempt to influence the court. He did not always approve of the kings, but he attempted to direct their course.

"My Father, My Father." Elijah stands out from the sacred page stern and almost forbidding. No word of appreciation or encouragement spoken by him stands in the sacred record. Nor can any tender word or utterance of love be found. He is known as the prophet of

justice; yet Elisha, who knows him best, seems to have had a real and genuine affection for him. The closing minutes of the time they spent together are spent in talking, and all the narrative suggests that this conversation had in it something of tender farewell. In the first two words Elisha sums up the sense of loss that he had sustained and his feeling of affection for the older prophet.

The Prophet was Israel's Safeguard. From his own personal loss Elisha passed to the thoughts that in Elijah's departure the nation was left defenseless. In this he saw a sadder loss to Israel than if the entire host of Jehoram had been swept away. He was the true host of

Israel; its bulwark of defense; its sword and shield in the day of battle. The strength of chariots and horses on which earthly kings depended for victory had been concentrated on Israel's behalf in him. It was a splendid tribute to the influence and power of one man, but the praise, though given in the freshness of grief, was not overdrawn. Because he was devoted to God and strove for the truth, he averted Israel's doom for a time, and his policy was Israel's best protection against foreign foes. What Elijah was to Israel, Elisha became. The other prophets, likewise, notably Elisha, became the real bulwark of strength to the nation.

LESSON STORY.

We come now to the closing scene in the life of Elijah. His earthly mission is ended. He had been called up higher and the time of his departure is at hand. Through all his varied experiences he has gone from strength to strength and from glory to glory. So much of his life has been lived in the encompassing presence of the Almighty, that at this supreme hour he does not feel the need of human sympathy. He rather yearns to be alone. To such great souls, with a constant sense of God's presence, solitude can never be a burden. But in his present desire to be alone, he could hardly have been thinking of himself only. He is about to be taken from one with whom for ten years or more he has walked in closest fellowship, and, realized the grief which his departure shall occasion, he longs to spare his servants the pain of parting.

Together they have come to Gilgal in the hills of Ephraim. The master prophet is making his last visit to the school of the prophets which he had fostered there. His parting words may linger with and be a blessing to these young men when he is gone. Leaving Gilgal he urges Elisha to remain and let him pass on alone

to Bethel. But to the faithful servant his master's presence is dearer than any earthly boon, and he solemnly declares that he will not leave him; and so together they journey on to Bethel.

Here, at the former seat of the calf-worship set up by Jeroboam, had been established another school of the prophets. News had reached the students of the imminent departure of their master, and in subdued tones they tell Elisha. It is to him a matter too deep and sacred for words, and he bids them hold their peace. The prophet on leaving Bethel again entreats his servant to tarry there while he goes on to Jericho. But his devoted follower clings to him with a tenacity as strong as that of Jacob wrestling with the angel, and he declares more earnestly than ever that he will not let him go. Then, together, they come to Jericho. Into the school of the prophets the news has preceded them, that their great teacher is to be taken away, and they ask his servant if he knows about it. How this cold questioning must have grated on the spirit of Elisha! But not a trace of impatience is found in his gentle answer. They are only enjoined to be silent. Elijah's earthly journey is almost

at its end. Three stages of it—Gilgal, Bethel, and Jericho—have been passed, and but one remains.

As he starts on his way to the Jordan his servant is bidden for the last time to let him go alone; but no entreaty can now separate Elisha from Elijah. A company of fifty sons of the prophets, standing afar off, watch them with rapt interest as they approach the Jordan. "The man of God" is seen to take his mantle of hair from his shoulders and, rolling it tightly together, to smite the waters of the Jordan. Suddenly the waves part asunder, making a dry path on which they cross together.

The parting scene has come. The master would not leave his servant comfortless. He yearns to enrich him with some great blessing. Realizing the infinite power of God, his nearness and his willingness to answer prayer, he would seal his earthly ministry; he would make it the closing act of his life to offer a prayer on behalf of his servant. He asks what it shall be. What should it be? Not power, nor wealth, long life nor triumph over his enemies—none of these could satisfy Elisha—but a double portion of the spirit of his master. He is told that it is a hard thing he has asked; nevertheless, if Elisha shall see him at the moment of his departure, his prayer shall be granted.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What striking sin was shown in Ahab with reference to the vineyard?
2. Why was Naboth justified in refusing to sell to Ahab his vineyard? (See Helpful Question No. 2.)
3. How was justice observed in form while violated in fact in Naboth's trial?
4. What accusation and prophecy of evil came to Ahab?
5. What prophecy of evil was spoken concerning Jezebel? How fulfilled? (2 Kings 9:30-37.)

(7)

As prophet and servant go on and are talking together, quickly a chariot and horses of fire part them asunder, and Elijah is taken up by a whirlwind into heaven. Elisha, gazing with awe upon the vision, exclaims, "My father! my father! the chariots of Israel and the horsemen thereof." The "prophet of fire," he who had been for strength as the very chariots and horsemen of Israel, is lost to sight. The bereft disciple in a passionate burst of grief rends his garments, then, catching up Elijah's mantle, which had fallen from him, retraces his steps to the Jordan. Calling upon the God of Elijah, he smites with his mantle the waves, which part asunder, and then he passes over.

This mark of the divine favor, viewed by the sons of the prophets, is taken as proof that the spirit of Elijah now rests upon his servant. They come and bow themselves before him, thus owning him as their future leader. But the new teacher is met at once with skepticism on the part of his students. They question the reality of his master's ascension, and ask that a company of fifty strong men be sent out to search through all the mountains to find him. Although certain of the truth, Elisha deals patiently with their unbelief, allowing them to investigate for themselves. The search is thorough and ends in their returning to the prophet with every doubt removed.

6. Tell the story of the battle of Ramoth-Gilead. (See 1 Kings 22.)

7. Tell of Micaiah and his thrilling prophecy.

8. What lesson may we learn of man's precaution to thwart God's will?

9. Sum up Ahab's faults and see wherein he most deeply sinned.

10. What is said of Ahab's son, who succeeded him? 1 Kings 22:51-53; 2 Kings 1.

11. Under what circumstances did Elijah appear again in public? (See Historical Connection.) 2 Kings 1.

HELPFUL QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. What is the analogy between this lesson and the Golden Text? Gen. 5:24.
2. What was God's purpose with reference to Elijah, his work being done? 2 Kings 2:1.
3. What merciful provision was God going to make for Israel after the departure of Elijah? 2 Kings 2:1.
4. Did Elijah wish to be alone at this time? and if so why? 2 Kings 2:2. (See Suggestions.)
5. What may we learn of Elisha's affection for Elijah? 2 Kings 2:2. 2 Kings 3:11. (Note his spirit all through the lesson.)
6. What shows that Elisha knew his master would be taken away? 2 Kings 2:3.
7. What further showed that Elijah wished to be alone? 2 Kings 2:4.
8. What similar experience occurred at Jericho? 2 Kings 2:5.
9. What request did Elijah make of Elisha now for the third time? 2 Kings 2:6.
10. What persons became deeply interested in the two prophets at this time, and how did they show that interest? 2 Kings 2:7.
11. What was Elijah's picturesque action as he stood by the Jordan? 2 Kings 2:8.
12. What language did Elijah address to Elisha after crossing the river? And what did Elisha say? 2 Kings 2:9.
13. What two things did Elijah then say to Elisha? 2 Kings 2:10.
14. What two things were the two prophets doing when parted asunder? 2 Kings 2:11.
15. When Elisha saw that Elijah was taken up in the whirlwind what did he say? What do? 2 Kings 2:12.
16. What three things did Elisha, as told in verse 13?
17. What did he do and say and what were the two results at the Jordan? 2 Kings 2:14.
16. What did the fifty prophets declare and do and what were the results? 2 Kings 2:15-18.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. The strong attachment of Elisha for his Master reminds one of Ruth's love for Naomi. The helpful preparation given to Elisha by Elijah suggests the help Joshua received of Moses, but more particularly the training of the apostles by the Saviour and of Timothy and others by the apostle Paul. The training of Elisha in the presence of Elijah was better than any training in the schools of the prophets. Timothy (2 Tim. 2:2) was told to teach to others the things which he had learned of Paul, that they, in turn, might communicate the same truths to others.
2. The best gift of the Lord to Elisha was not simply the knowledge, the theoretical instruction, of Elijah, but the spirit of Elijah. It is an essential preparation for preaching and teaching the Scriptures to receive the spirit of Christ and of his worthy prophets. There is not enough study on the part of students for the ministry and for Sunday-school pedagogy of, and in immediate connection with, the most spiritual and efficient pastors and trainers of men. Pathology in medicine is as important as anatomy and histology. A knowledge of actual conditions and needs of the people, of their sins and follies, vanities and perversities, likes and dislikes, is needful. As the remedy must be suited to the disease in medicine, so must the message be suited

to the peculiarities and necessities of the people.

3. When Elisha, after Elijah's ascension, possessed his spirit the latter could not have seemed to him far away. Likewise, only in a far greater and deeper sense, to the apostles Jesus seemed nearer after than before his ascension.

4. Although sorrow must have filled Elisha's heart at the contemplated separation of himself and his master, yet he was willing to suffer for so helpful a fellowship and service.

5. Sweet and inspiring are the companionships of men who together enjoy visions of God and duty. It meant a deal of comfort for Paul to be able to say to Timothy that, although all other companions in Christ had left him, Luke, "the beloved physician," was with him. 1 Tim. 4:11.

6. God has always prepared for a succession of faithful prophets and servants. The gates of Hades shall not prevail against his church.

Lesson XI.

March 12.

ELISHA THE PROPHET RESTORES A CHILD TO LIFE.

2 Kings 4:8-37. (Print verses 25-37.)

GOLDEN TEXT—The free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.
Rom. 6:22.

Memory Verses—32-35. **Suggested Reading**—Luke 7:11-17. **Time**—About 896 B. C. **Persons**—Elisha, Gehazi, the Shunammite, her son. **Places**—Shunem, Mt. Carmel.

DAILY READINGS.

Mch. 6.....M—2 Kings 4:8-16 —The Prophet's Sense of Obligation.
Mch. 7.....T—2 Kings 4:17-37—The Child Restored to Life.
Mch. 8.....W—2 Kings 2:19-22 —Healing of Waters at Jericho.
Mch. 9.....T—2 Kings 3:1-27 —The Defeat of the Moabites.
Mch. 10....F—2 Kings 4:1-7.—The Helping of the Poor Widow.
Mch. 11....S—2 Kings 4:38-44—Feeding a Multitude of People.
Mch. 12....S—Mark 5:21-24, 35-43—Jesus Restoring a Little Maid.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES. ..

Shunem. This city has been previously mentioned in the history of Israel, though no great event is connected with the place. Here the Philistines camped during Saul's last war with them (1 Sam. 28:4) and this was the native place of Abishag, the fair young maiden who was chosen to nourish David in his extreme old age (1 Kings 1:3). The narrative of Saul's last campaign and this story in the career of Elisha enable us to determine the site of ancient Shunem. It was opposite Mt. Gilboa (1 Sam. 28:4), and somewhat more distant from that mountain than Jezreel (1 Sam. 29:11). This would place it in the plain of Esdraelon, and here is located the small village of Sulem, evidently a corruption of Shunem, about four miles distant from Jezreel. It is now a collection of miserable huts, and probably never was much of a town. Its location on the plain was unfavorable to security and it was

probably a village of farmers only. The road the woman traveled stretched across the plain to Mt. Carmel, distant about sixteen miles, and her eye could trace it as she started from her home. The modern dweller in Shunem and the guides are able to point out the field in which the boy was stricken with illness. It is near a certain lemon tree. They are able to point out the house, too, though unfortunately it has lost the prophet's chamber. The bed, table, stool and candlestick which she provided for him have also perished.

Mt. Carmel. See Geographical Notes on the lesson for February 12th. It was here mentioned that Carmel was noted as a place for worship and retreat. Probably Elisha sought it for both of these reasons. After Elijah's translation he went there (2 Kings 2:25), and we infer from verse 23 that he held gatherings there for religious worship on new moons and Sabbaths.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

After Elijah's departure Elisha took up his task. He did his work, however, in quite a different way from Elijah. He did not make use of the spectacular, though he did make a more extensive use of miracles. He mingled with men and traveled to and fro over the country in the discharge of his prophetic mission. His first independent act as a prophet was a prophecy spoken to deliver Israel, Judah and Edom when they were lost in the desert to the south of the Dead Sea (2 Kings 3). He was then accompanying the army of Israel. After this he is found working in the borders of Israel exclusively, except for one visit which he made to Damascus (2 Kings 8:7-15). Of his private life nothing

is told. He is found at many places, at Carmel, Dothan, Gilgal and Samaria. He was attended by a servant who bore the name of Gehazi. He was at times the adviser of the king, and seems to have exerted considerable influence at court. A number of incidents of his life are told, but their arrangement is such that we can not be certain that they are given in chronological order. The one constituting our lesson did not occur either at the beginning or at the close of his life. He was already a prophet when he first came to know the Shunammite, and the child was no longer small (v. 18) at the time of its death. After this she spent seven years in exile (2 Kings 8:1-6) before the prophet reached the end of his career.

INTRODUCTION TO THE LESSON.

This incident stands unconnected with any other event in the career of Elisha. It is introduced by the indefinite statement, "it fell on a day," and closes with out being related in any way to any other incident of his life. It is therefore an isolated event. Elisha, in his journeyings, had to pass through Shunem. Here lived a great woman. Her greatness consisted evidently in wealth, and in exactly this way Nabal (1 Sam. 25:3) and Barzillai (2 Sam. 19:32) are described, and there, even more than here, it is evident that their wealth constituted their greatness. She was a devout woman and one who had respect for the prophet, so she importuned Elisha to accept her hospitality and would not accept a refusal. To stop at her home and to be refreshed by her hospitality became a fixed custom with the prophet whenever he had occasion to pass that way. This she encouraged, and, for his sole benefit, built upon the flat top of her house a small chamber

and furnished it with such articles as would contribute to his comfort. The table and the seat are indications that she expected him to use it for other purposes than a sleeping apartment. Elisha wished to give her a suitable reward for her kindness, and proposed that he speak on her behalf to the king or the captain of the host. It is an interesting sidelight on the prophet's character. He felt that he had some influence at the court and could secure her some favors if there was any that she desired. But the woman declined. Her answer was, "I dwell among mine own people." She had no wrongs of which she wished to make complaint; she had no quarrel with a neighbor which might be settled in her favor by an appeal to one in power; she did not covet the social distinction which might arise from introduction to the court. Her life was an undisturbed and a contented one amid the rural environments of Shunem. After her departure from the room Gehazi suggested to the prophet that the woman

25 So she went, and came unto the man of God to mount Carmel.

And it came to pass, when the man of God saw her afar off, that he said to Gehazi his servant, Behold, yonder is

the Shunammite: 26 run, I pray thee, now to meet her, and say unto her, Is it well with thee? is it well with thy husband? is it well with the child? And

had no son. To be barren was reckoned a disgrace. Elisha then announced to her that she should have a son. The woman, surprised and humble, replies to him, "Do not lie to thy handmaid." In due time the child was born. Some years passed. The child is spoken of as grown, though by this we are not to suppose that he was fully grown, for she was able to hold him in her lap and carry his body to the bed. He was probably six or eight years old. In the heat of summer he went into the harvest field and was stricken with sudden illness, probably sunstroke. The father sent him to the house by a servant, but continued at his labor, since he evidently did not regard the illness as serious. In the house, however, a sad scene is being enacted. The child sits on his mother's knees till noon and then dies. The mother carried the corpse to the chamber of Elisha and placed it upon the bed. She did this partly in order to keep the child's death a secret, and

partly because, in her grief, she looked to the prophet as the only one who could give her aid. Her deep, strong faith in the prophet is the explanation of her effort to conceal the fact of her child's death. When any person is plunged in grief, and feels that there is but one person who can give comfort, that one person is the only one with whom he desires to hold conversation. So was it with the Shunammite. She sends to her husband for a servant to drive and an ass upon which she may ride to the man of God. To his question of surprise as to why she wished to go to the prophet, since it is not the usual days on which she is accustomed to go to him for worship, she returns an evasive answer. The animal and servant are sent, and she commands the servant to drive forward and not to slacken the pace, except at her command. The distance was about sixteen miles, and would have required fully three hours to complete the journey.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 25. So she went: In the way described in verse 24. She rode an ass and the servant followed, driving after the fashion of donkey boys in modern Cairo. Man of God: This was the usual title applied to Elisha. In too many cases this, as a designation for a prophet, was only official. In his case, however, it was no misnomer. The Shunammite declared him to be truly a "holy man of God" (v. 9). To Mt. Carmel: See Geographical Notes. Gehazi: He is mentioned for the first time in verse 12. Nothing is known as to his

origin and native place, nor are we told when and why Elisha chose him as his servant. Behold yonder, etc.: Elisha recognized her, and her appearance on this unusual day surprised him, as her intention of going had surprised her husband.

26. Ran . . . to meet: This and the questions indicate Elisha's esteem for her. She answered, It is well: The English translation is too strong. She gave to Gehazi the same answer which she had given to her husband (v. 23), that is, the one word, *peace*. In neither

she answered, It is well. 27 And when she came to the man of God to the hill, she caught hold of his feet. And Gehazi came near to thrust her away; but the man of God said, Let her alone: for her soul is vexed within her; and Jehovah hath hid it from me, and hath not told me. 28 Then she said, Did I desire a son of my lord? did I not say, Do not deceive me? 29 Then he said to Gehazi, Gird up thy loins, and take my staff in thy hand, and go thy way: if thou meet

any man, salute him not; and if any salute thee, answer him not again: and lay my staff upon the face of the child. 30 And the mother of the child said, As Jehovah liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee. And he arose, and followed her. 31 And Gehazi passed on before them, and laid the staff upon the face of the child; but there was neither voice, nor hearing. Wherefore he returned to meet him, and told him, saying, The child is not awaked.

case can she be charged with falsehood. It is like the Latin *recte* (Cf. the German *gut*), when one does not wish to give a definite reply to a question and yet wishes to pacify the inquirer. (Keil).

27. **Caught hold of his feet:** She thus gives expression to her grief and adds force to her supplication. To thrust her away: The servant thought this was derogatory to the master's dignity. The disciples marveled that Jesus should talk to the Samaritan woman (John 4: 27). Jehovah hath hid it from me: Inspiration did not imply that the prophet was fully informed as to all past events, nor did knowledge of the future on one point imply that he knew all of the future.

28. The narrative is very natural. Grief or any other strong emotion renders one incoherent. She does not say that her son is dead. Her mind has been working over the thought that her distress is greater now that she has had a son and lost him than if he had never been born. This is what she means by reminding the prophet of his promise and her reply.

29. **Gird up thy loins:** A necessary preparation for swift traveling (Luke 12:35). **Salute him not:** Jesus said likewise to the seventy, "Salute no man on the way" (Luke 10:4). In giving salutations an inferior would stand aside till the superior could pass. This would

cause delay, and might provoke conversation which would cause further delay. **Lay my staff upon the face of the child:** Elisha did not believe that his staff had magical power as the superstitious believe about relics, etc., but he thought that his prophetic power might be transferred to his staff, the emblem of his prophetic office. In this Elisha was mistaken. It is scarcely in keeping with the sincerity and earnestness of the prophet to explain, as some have, that Elisha commanded Gehazi to do this in order to advance his own importance as a miracle worker; to teach that miracles may not be wrought by inanimate objects; nor to teach any other lesson to Gehazi or the Shunammite.

30. **I will not leave thee:** The woman has no faith in the expedient of the staff in the hands of the servant. She relies upon the prophet solely. **He arose and followed her:** The servant had been sent on ahead because he could arrive more quickly. Probably the prophet anticipated that his staff would prevent complete dissolution, even if it did not restore to life.

31. **Nor hearing:** Literally, "attention." See margin. Cf. 1 Kings 18:29. There was no response to the mute prayer expressed through the sending of the staff. No word is used to indicate that any blame is attached to Gehazi, though the commentators have accused

32 And when Elisha was come into the house, behold, the child was dead, and laid upon his bed. 33 He went in therefore, and shut the door upon them twain, and prayed unto Jehovah. 34 And he went up, and lay upon the child, and put his mouth upon his mouth, and his eyes upon his eyes, and his hands upon his hands: and he stretched himself upon him; and the flesh of the child waxed warm. 35 Then he returned, and walked

in the house once to and fro; and went up, and stretched himself upon him: and the child sneezed seven times, and the child opened his eyes. 36 And he called Gehazi, and said, Call this Shunammite. So he called her. And when she was come in unto him, he said, Take up thy son. 37 Then she went in, and fell at his feet, and bowed herself to the ground; and she took up her son, and went out.

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him of loitering on the way or of being puffed up by the importance of his commission. The child is not awaked: This is not to be interpreted as an indication that the child was not dead, for death was even then compared to sleep (1 Kings 1:21). Verse 20 states that the child died.

32. It seems that the prophet did not know all of the facts until after his arrival. He and the mother, then, had not talked on the way.

33. And shut the door, etc.: Jesus sought partial solitude for himself when he raised the daughter of Jairus. Cf. Mark 5:40. Prayed unto Jehovah: This was the only remedy known to him. The lying and the stretching himself upon the child and the walking to and

fro in the house are expressions of his prayerful spirit. Elijah, too, prayed under similar circumstances (1 Kings 17:20), and the Lord did likewise (John 11:41, 42).

34. In addition to prayer he used such means as suggested themselves and in doing so he imitated his master Elijah in raising the widow's son from death (1 Kings 17:17-24).

35. Walked in the house once to and fro: It is not to be thought that this had any effect in bringing life back to the child, nor that it was done for this purpose by Elisha. It indicates the great excitement that Elisha was under.

37. Note that she showed her gratitude before she indulged her natural affection by embracing the child.

COMMENTS.

The History of Elisha. The incident which constitutes our lesson is one of a series of disconnected incidents. That they have no chronological connection has been mentioned before. Now this prophet lived to an extreme old age, and his prophetic career extended over almost sixty years (2 Kings 3:1; 10:36; 13:1, 10, 14). It is evident therefore that we have very meager information about Elisha's life and activities. The author of Kings has made selection of those things which he felt to be the

more important to vindicate Elisha's claim to be a prophet. Those who question the truthfulness of the history of Elisha point to what they call "a multiplication of miracles," and thereby attempt to throw doubt upon the history. But when we compare the length of time during which Elisha was active with the small number of miracles recorded, it will be observed that it does not average more than one miracle for every five years. It can not be said therefore that there is any excessive multiplication of

the miraculous. It has been the theory of commentators, both early and recent, that these narratives "were recorded in a special work before they were incorporated in our present book of Kings." While there is no direct proof of the truth of this theory, it is not at all incredible and aids much in understanding the structure of Elisha's history.

Comparison with Elijah's Raising the Son of the Widow of Zarephath. Those who doubt the historicity of much of the Old Testament have attempted to throw doubt on this incident by pointing out certain resemblances between this and Elijah's raising from the dead the son of the widow of Zarephath (Kings 17:17-24). The conclusion drawn from these resemblances is that one story was based on the other. That there are resemblances, especially in the action of the two prophets in the raising of the dead, has already been pointed out. No doubt Elisha consciously and purposely imitated the old prophet who had been his master. But after the resemblance has been fully recognized it remains true that the differences are many and striking. This, coupled with the fact that the resemblances may be satisfactorily explained, does away with the hypothesis that one narrative grew out of the other. The narrative of Elisha and the Shunammite is composed of two parts, the first of which (vs. 8-17) forms a complete whole in itself. It narrates the hospitality of the Shunammite to the traveling prophet, the promise which he made her and its fulfillment. Here the story might have ceased. There is nothing in the story of Elijah and the widow of Zarephath which has any resemblance to this. The second part (vs. 18-37) is an incident which occurred after an interval of some years, but is based on the former, since the mother appeals to Elisha's promise (v. 28). All similarity between this and the previous miracle is limited to the methods of resuscita-

tion, and even these are not entirely the same.

The Important Lesson of the Incident. Certain as it is that the author understood the raising of the boy to be a miracle, we are not to regard the exhibition of miraculous power by Elisha as the sole nor most important lesson of the incident. The important lesson is God's manner of dealing with the Shunammite, which does not differ from his dealing with other saints. "Three principal points in it come out into especial prominence: A son is given to a pious, God-fearing woman, who had received the prophet at her house and thereby a blessing, and fortune falls to her lot, which she had no longer dared to hope for; soon, however, a great trial intervenes; she is to lose her only son; she holds firmly to the word of promise, however, and sustains the trial; the son is given back to her again by the prophet, and now for the first time she experiences aright that the word of the Lord is true, and that he crowns at last with grace and compassion those who hope and hold fast their faith in him. This development of the history presents the course by which, as a general rule, God is wont to lead his children. This story, therefore, is a practical enunciation of the truth which extends throughout the entire Scriptures and is a fundamental law of the divine economy of salvation—the Lord "hath set apart him that is godly for himself" (Ps. 4:3). "It is he who killeth and maketh alive; that bringeth down to the grave and bringeth up" (1 Sam. 2:6). They who please God are preserved through the fire of adversity (Sir. 2:5). "All the paths of the Lord are merciful and true unto such as keep his covenant and testimonies" (Ps. 25:10). The glory of God is the end and aim of the entire story, and the work of the prophet serves here, as ever only to reach this end." (Lange.)

Gehazi's Part in the Miracle. (vs. 29-

31.) The command given by Elisha to Gehazi to carry the staff to the dead child, and its failure to accomplish anything, has provoked more discussion than any other part of the narrative. What was Elisha's motive, What did he expect his staff to accomplish? These are the questions for which men have sought answers. The Shunammite evidently understood that the prophet was having this done either wholly or partially to revive the child, but she did not have confidence in its effectiveness (v. 30). Gehazi also thought that it was to resuscitate the dead, and his report to Elisha virtually amounts to the declaration that it was a failure (v. 31). What the prophet expected is not indicated, but it is natural to assume that his expectations were not different from those of his companions. It follows, therefore, that the prophet tried an expedient which failed. It fulfilled neither his own nor the expectation of his companions. It is told, however, in all of its details, and this serves to convince us of the historical value of the incident and that the author was not seeking merely to glorify Elisha. It teaches also that the gifts bestowed by God's spirit can not be transferred to another, and that it was not of magical nature so that the prophetic power could reside in any ma-

terial object. These lessons were taught to Elisha himself as well as to us.

The Shunammite's Faith. The practical lesson to be learned from the Shunammite is that of quiet and sincere faith in God. Her home life before the prophet came to her was exemplary. She lived a quiet, religious life. When she saw the prophet passing her home she urged her hospitality upon him, and would not accept a refusal. She went on the stated days, according to the customs of the times, to worship (v. 23). But her real trial came when her son died, and the issue of that trial was no less favorable to her than was the test of Abraham's faith to him. It was the faith of the Shunammite which produced the miracle no less than that of Elisha. It was faith in the prophet and in his God. She relied solely upon him in her hour of grief and so confident was she of the favorable issue when he interceded before God on her behalf that she did not tell her husband of the death of the child. When she had informed the prophet of her sorrow, like Jacob, she will not let him go until he accompanies her. When he and she arrive at home she seems to rely entirely upon him. From the carrying of the dead child into the prophet's room until she clasped him in her arms alive again, all her actions are to be explained by her faith.

THE LESSON STORY.

The social life of Elisha is in striking contrast with that of Elijah. The one loved wild solitudes, dwelt apart from courts and busy throngs, while the other delighted in the companionship of men, was at home in crowded cities and by the army campfire. He also loved the quiet home life so little known to Elijah. The stories of this gentle prophet give us many interesting glimpses into the social life of Israel in his day.

Elisha, in his journeys to and fro among the schools of the prophets, often found a welcome stopping-place in the village

of Shunem, a little north of Jezreel. Here dwelt a lady of wealth whose husband owned much land. The prophet, with his servant Gehazi, often enjoyed the hospitality so eagerly pressed upon him by this good woman. In her earnest desire to do honor to the man of God, she had persuaded her husband to build for him a little room on the flat roof of her house, where he might come and go, having easy access by an outside staircase. The room was supplied with the simple furnishing of a bed, a seat, a table, and a lamp; and in this retreat

Elisha often found a resting place. Such hospitality toward a stranger could not lose its reward; and the prophet was eager to recompense the noble lady for her kindness. Possessed of so much wealth, she would hardly care for a gift of money. Through his servant, Gehazi, he inquires what service he may render. By this time Elisha's influence at court and in the camps of Israel is great, and the offer is made to help her there. But the woman declines. She has no worldly schemes to be advanced, and is content to dwell among her own people. When she is gone, the prophet, puzzled, turns to his servant, who tells him that he believes the deepest sorrow in this woman's life to be her childlessness. Again she is called, and, this time, receives the promise that within a year she shall "embrace a son." Overjoyed, yet incredulous, the boon seems too precious to be believed, even at the word of the man of God. At last, the promise realized, the lady of Shunem becomes the happy mother of a son.

When the child has grown old enough to go alone to his father in the harvest field, one day, while playing in the heat, he is stricken with a sudden illness and cries out, with pain, "Oh, my head, my head!" The father bids one of the lads to take him to his mother. She nurses him tenderly, but is powerless to restore, and, at noon, he dies. Taking the lifeless body in her arms she bears it to the prophet's chamber and lays it upon his bed. It is an hour of terrible bereavement. The Shunammite has lost her son, but she has not lost her faith in the God of Elisha. Through the prophet's prayer the child had been given, and through his prayer might he not also be restored?

No time is to be lost. She does not even wait to tell the sad news to her husband, but, calling him, requests that she may ride forth, with one of the servants, to find Elisha. He is surprised,

but does not question her. The prophet is at Carmel, sixteen miles away. From his lofty height he sees her coming afar off and sends Gehazi to meet her. He is to ask if it is well with her, with her husband, and with her child. To all she answer, "It is well!" Coming to the hill, to the man of God, she clings in voiceless agony to his feet. The servant would thrust her aside, but the prophet, deeply touched by her great sorrow, not yet revealed to him, bids Gehazi, "let her alone!" Then, in a burst of passionate grief, she tells Elisha of her loss. He calls his servant and, giving him his staff, symbol of the prophet's power, directs that he go quickly on his way and place it upon the face of the child. But this does not satisfy the stricken mother, who fervently declares that she will not return without Elisha, and then he follows her. By this time Gehazi has reached the home and placed the staff upon the face of the child, but in vain, for "the mightiest instruments are weak when selfishness and coldness wield them," and the servant has to meet his master with the words of failure: "The child has not yet awaked!" On reaching the home, Elisha goes alone to the chamber of death and shuts the door.

The door is shut, but God is there,
The living God who answers prayer;
What will the answer be?

After earnest supplication the prophet outstretches himself upon the lifeless body, which soon grows warm with returning breath. Having walked to and fro in the silent room, again he stretches himself upon the child, who now opens his eyes and looks up into the prophet's face. The mother, being called and her son restored, prostrates herself before the prophet in speechless gratitude, takes up her treasure and goes her way. And still what mighty miracles of grace are wrought

In many a lowly chamber with shut door,
Where God our Father is in secret sought
And shows himself in mercy more and more.
Dim upper rooms with God's own glory shine,
And souls are lifted to the life divine.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. How long had Elisha been Elijah's servant? (See Lesson Story.)
2. What three mountains are associated with Elijah's life?
3. What important experience in Elijah's life? 1 Kings 19:9-18.
4. What were a few striking resemblances between Elijah and John the Baptist?
5. In what respect do you think Israel was benefited by Elijah's ministry?
6. What service remained for Elijah to

7. Who sought Elijah, how long and with what result, after his ascent? 2 Kings 2:15-18.
8. What, probably, was the most important after his experience at Horeb?
9. What does the choice of Elisha as Elijah's successor suggest as to the general provision God makes for carrying on his work?
10. What was the greatest gift within Elisha's power to bestow upon Elisha?
11. What is the greatest gift of Christ to his followers?

HELPFUL QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. What is the significance of the phrase "a great woman"? 2 Kings 4:8. (See Introduction.)
2. Where was Shunem located and what were a few of its associations? 2 Kings 4:8. (See also Introduction.)
3. What is intimated concerning her hospitality to Elisha? 2 Kings 4:8.
4. What did she say to her husband as to her opinion of Elisha? 2 Kings 4:9.
5. What remarkable favor did she and her husband show to the prophet? 2 Kings 4:10.
6. What may we conclude as to the frequency with which Elisha passed this home and stopped for rest and refreshment? 2 Kings 8:11.
7. Whom did Elisha have for a servant and what did Elisha request of him? 2 Kings 4:12.
8. When the woman, for her hospitality, was asked if she would be spoken

for to the king, what was her answer? 2 Kings 4:13.

9. What, then, was the suggestion of Gehazi? 2 Kings 4:14.

10. What promise did Elisha make to the woman at which her faith at first stumbled? 2 Kings 4:15, 16.

11. When the child had grown to boyhood, where did he go, and what occurred? 2 Kings 4:18-21.

12. What, then, did the mother do, whom did she call and what did he say? 2 Kings 4:22.

13. At what place was Elisha found, and why had he been sought? 2 Kings 4:23-25.

14. What part did the servant perform in what follows? 2 Kings 4:25-31.

15. What then did the prophet himself do for the woman? 2 Kings 4:32-36.

16. How was the mother's gratitude expressed for God's mercy? 2 Kings 4:37.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

The change from storm to quiet impresses one as he contemplates the transition from Elijah to Elisha.

John the Baptist, the unique and startling prophet of the wilderness of Judea,

the Elijah who was to come, gave place to Jesus—who should "not strive nor cry aloud," and whose voice should not be heard in the streets.

The Old Testament is full of tempests.

The New is quiet, but its words are powerful, and shall yet shake both heaven and earth.

The disciples at Pentecost were filled with the promised Spirit of Christ whereby they did greater works than were ever wrought by Elisha or his predecessor.

It required the flaming chariot and horses to carry Elijah home. Jesus as he stood and blessed his disciples began gently to ascend until a cloud received him out of their sight.

Jesus blessed many a home in his earthly ministry. He raised to life the little daughter of Jairus. He restored to life the widow's only son and gave him to support his mother in the village of Nain. He comforted the hearts of Mary and Martha in the town of Beth-

any, when, for the glory of God, he called Lazarus back from the spirit world.

Elisha found it necessary to prostrate himself upon the dead child before its life returned, Jesus only spoke the word which, heard by the sleeping soul, brought the dead back to life and loving friends. He is the Resurrection and the Life; he who believes in him shall never die. No man shall be able to pluck his living ones out of his hands. He and the Father are one.

Jesus refers both to Elijah and Elisha in the sermon spoken in Nazareth when the Jews became angered at his kindly mention of the Gentiles. Luke 4:25-27. He referred to the widow of Zarephath, to whom Elijah was sent, and to the Syrian Naaman, who was sent to Elisha to be cleansed from his leprosy.

DEFEAT THROUGH DRUNKENNESS.

Temperance Lesson. 1 Kings 20:12-21.

GOLDEN TEXT—It is not for kings to drink wine, nor for princes to say, Where is strong drink? Prov. 31:4.

Memory Verse—12. **Suggested Reading**—1 Kings 20. **Time**—907 B. C. **Persons**—Ben-hadad, thirty-two allied kings, servants of Ben-hadad, Ahab, an unnamed prophet, servants of the princes of the provinces. **Place**—Samaria.

DAILY READINGS.

Mch. 13.... M—1 Kings 20:12-21.—Defeat Through Drunkenness.

Mch. 14.... T—Prov. 31:1-9—It is not for Kings to Drink Wine.

Mch. 15.... W—Isaiah 5:1-23 —The Drunkards go Into Captivity.

Mch. 16.... T—Isaiah 28:1-14 —Staggering with Strong Drink.

Mch. 17.... F—Hos. 4:6-19 —Wine and New Wine Take Away the Heart.

Mch. 18.... S—Amos 2:6-16—Giving the Nazarites Wine to Drink.

Mch. 19... S—Amos 6:1-6—The People that Drink Wine in Bowls.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Samaria. (See Geographical Notes on lesson for January 22.) When Ben-hadad invaded the land the people from the surrounding districts hurried into the stronghold at Samaria. Ahab and his subjects were securely intrenched behind the strong walls of the city, while the Syrian army camped in the valley below. An assault of the city was doubtful and hazardous, but Ben-hadad was preparing to make one at the time of our lesson.

Ben-hadad, the King of Syria. Damascus and the surrounding territory were under the control of Israel during the reigns of David and Solomon. Towards the close of the latter's life a revolt against his authority was organized in Damascus under the leadership of Rezon (1 Kings 11:23-25). In the days of Asa this government had become a strong power, and its head was Ben-hadad, the grandson of Hezion (1 King 15:18). Many commentators identify the Hezion of this passage with the Rezon who was Solomon's adversary. The hereditary

foe of David's line was employed by Asa to break the power of Israel, and the advantage he gained was followed up by subsequent kings of Damascus. His son and successor was also called Ben-hadad, and waged a successful war against Omri (1 Kings 20:34). The Ben-hadad of our present lesson was the third to bear this name or title, for according to Nicholas of Damascus this, like Pharaoh of Egypt, was a title, rather than a personal name (1 Kings 20:34). He was at the head of a strong confederacy of thirty-two kings. They were not lords over territory of any considerable extent, but probably of single cities only with their adjacent territory. They were vassals of Ben-hadad, who paid him tribute and aided him in war. The Assyrian inscriptions of this period give to us the same picture of the government of this district. It was parceled out into a number of petty kingdoms, the chief powers of which were the Hittites, Hamath and Damascus. One of the Assyrian gods was Adad, so the name Ben-hadad means son of the God Adad.

12 And it came to pass, when Ben-hadad heard this message, as he was drinking, he and the kings, in the pavilions, that he said unto his servants,

Set yourselves in array. And they set themselves in array against the city.

13 And, behold, a prophet came near unto Ahab king of Israel, and said, Thus

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

In time our lesson goes back a few years to the reign of Ahab. This is done because an incident of his reign affords example of the inefficiency which is produced by drunkenness. Ben-hadad of Damascus came against Ahab with a great host. His motive was to gain spoil and to make Ahab a vassal to his authority (v. 3). Had he sought spoil only, he would not have invested Samaria. On his arrival before the capital he sent an insolent message to Ahab, claiming by the right of superior power, his wealth, his family and the best of all that Ahab possessed. Ahab loved ease and inaction, and he was willing to accede to Ben-hadad's demand without a struggle. Ahab undoubtedly understood by this that he was to become a dependent king under Ben-hadad. He would be required to pay tribute, but could continue to enjoy his kingdom and possessions. Ben-hadad was not inclined to let Ahab off so lightly. He thought the king of Israel was overawed by his power, and so sent tidings to Ahab

that on the morrow he would send his servants to take whatever Ahab valued most. It was a blow aimed directly at Ahab's pride and love of luxury. Ben-hadad's plan was not to humble Ahab alone, however, but his nobles as well. So Ahab summoned an assembly of the elders of the land, the highest officers of the government, those who would be seriously affected by this action of Ben-hadad. These and the people also encouraged Ahab to resist, and a definite refusal was sent to Ben-hadad. His reply was a boast that Samaria should be utterly destroyed. He would bring against it so large a force that the ashes and dust of the destroyed city would not be sufficient for each one of his followers to bring away a handful. Ahab's spirited reply shows him at his best. "Let not him that girdeth on his armor boast himself as he that putteth it off." This defiance was shown on either side, and Ben-hadad ordered immediate preparation for battle.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 12. Drinking: It is evident that there was little discipline in the army of Ben-hadad. He had little fear of the strength of Ahab. Pavilions: Marginal reading is "huts." The word is the same as that which is usually translated "booths" (Gen. 33:17; Lev. 23:42; Jon. 4:5). They were distinguished from the military tents by the fact that they were stationary, whereas the tent was movable. Huts made, most probably of branches of trees, were constructed to shelter the king and chief officers during the siege. Similar constructions are made

for the modern Turkish Pashas while they are on expeditions. Set yourselves in array: The answer of Ben-hadad consisted of but one word, which may be translated "set," or "bring up." If the former is the meaning, then, the translation of the text is correct; if the latter, then that of the margin, "Place the engines." The Septuagint gives it the latter meaning, but the former is more likely correct. It was an assault, and not a siege, for which Ben-hadad prepares.

13. A prophet: He was certainly not Elijah. The Jewish rabbis conjecture that

saith Jehovah, Hast thou seen all this great multitude? behold, I will deliver it into thy hand this day; and thou shalt know that I am Jehovah. 14 And Ahab said, By whom? And he said, Thus saith Jehovah, By the young men of the princes of the provinces. Then he said, Who shall begin the battle? And he answered, Thou. 15 Then he mustered the young men of the princes of the provinces, and they were two hundred and thirty-two; and after them he mustered

all the people, even all the children of Israel, being seven thousand.

16 And they went out at noon. But Ben-hadad was drinking himself drunk in the pavilions, he and the kings, the thirty and two kings that helped him. 17 And the young men of the princes of the provinces went out first; and Ben-hadad sent out, and they told him, saying, There are men come out from Samaria. 18 And he said, Whether they are come out for peace, take them alive;

he was Micaiah, but this is not likely, for Ahab said that Micaiah always prophesied evil concerning him (1 Kings 22: 8). It is significant that some among the prophets of Jehovah aided Ahab. **This great multitude:** A comparison of verses 25, 29 and 30 shows that this host numbered as many as 130,000 at least. The boast of Ben-hadad that he would bring a great army against Samaria (v. 10) was not without a basis of truth. **Thou shalt know that I am Jehovah:** This shows the purpose of the victory. It also shows that this was a true prophet of Jehovah.

14. **Princes of the provinces:** These were the administrators appointed over separate districts of the country. They had been driven into Samaria by Ben-hadad, and each had with him a body of servants. (See margin.) **Young men:** Various explanations have been offered as to who these were: "Young lads of tender age" (Ewald); "Youths unaccustomed to war" (Rawlinson). The readiness with which Ahab accepts the proposal to make them the leaders of the charge suggests that they were a select body of strong young men. **Who shall begin the battle?** This question means, which side shall begin the battle. Ahab did not lead the servants of the provinces, but remained in the city until they had made their attack (v. 21).

15. **Seven thousand:** It is difficult

to account for so small a number. It shows that Ahab's kingdom was not in a very flourishing condition. Probably many warriors were prevented from coming to Samaria by the suddenness of Ben-hadad's attack.

16. **At noon:** This was the hour when the king and leaders would be eating. They probably followed this by a period of rest or sleep. Hence Ahab chose this as the time when Ben-hadad would be least prepared for an attack. **Drinking himself drunk:** He thus shows his utter contempt for his foe, but in so doing he neglected all of the ordinary precautions which a sober and prudent king would have taken, even against an enemy that he was confident he could overcome.

17. **Ben-hadad sent out:** It seems almost incredible, yet this strongly implies that Ben-hadad had no pickets posted or watchmen whose duty it was to inform him of important events. By sounds of excitement in the camp, or in some other way, Ben-hadad came to know that something unusual was taking place. He sent out messengers to inquire what it was, and in this way he learned that an attack on his army was about to be made.

18. **Take them alive:** Take them as prisoners whether they have come to treat or to surrender. In his drunkenness Ben-hadad is not only over-confident, but he is also insolent, and violated

or whether they are come out for war, take them alive. 19 So these went out of the city, the young men of the princes of the provinces, and the army which followed them. 20 And they slew every one his man; and the Syrians fled, and

Israel pursued them: and Ben-hadad the king of Syria escaped on a horse with horseman. 21 And the King of Israel went out, and smote the horses and chariots, and slew the Syrians with a great slaughter.

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all the rules of ancient as well as modern warfare.

19. The army which followed them: The 7,000 mentioned in verse 15.

20. They slew every one his man: The battle at first was a series of single combats; each one of the 232 coping with the man opposite him. The result was entirely favorable to Israel. The Syrians fled: One of the features of oriental warfare is the frequent occurrence of hasty and disordered flight of a vast army before an insignificant enemy. At

the battle of Arbela, where Alexander finally defeated Darius, almost a million Persians fled before an army of 40,000 Greeks. Escaped on a horse with horsemen: Ben-hadad, with a part of the cavalry, made an escape. This seems to have been at the very beginning of the battle. It was not a defeat, but a panic, which ended in a completely disordered flight.

21. Notice that Ahab does not leave the city until he sees the Syrians in flight.

COMMENTS.

The Background. No hint is given as to how long a time had elapsed since the long drought before the Syrian wars commenced. Damascus was Israel's greatest and most dreaded foe. During the reign of Omri, as well as during that of Baasha, campaigns had been carried on by the king of Damascus in the territory of Israel. Success seems to have attended these invasions of the Syrian king, and to him was conceded the control of certain cities, and even in Samaria he had control of some bazaars (v. 34). This placed within the territory of Israel a disturbing factor which was able constantly to weaken and disturb the nation. Such marauding wars as Ben-hadad waged would usually take place in the summer season, when the opportunity to feel the army was better. The details of the narrative seem to indicate that Israel was disheartened. Ahab was not a successful nor a vigorous leader. Ben-hadad had been successful in the past, and so only a handful of men came

to Ahab's aid. But as a sort of balance to this disheartened state of the nation was the more favorable attitude of the religious party in Israel. In the aid given by the prophets to Ahab we have proof that Elijah's campaign in the interests of Jehovah has not been in vain. The prophets are once more active in the northern kingdom. While many of them were permeated by the spirit of subserviency and falsehood (1 Kings 22: 5-8), there were some who were true to Jehovah, and these seek to convince Ahab and the nation of Jehovah's power.

The Significance of the Victory. That day on Mount Carmel, if it did not put an end to idolatry at once, had at least broken its power, as was already evident from the mere fact that the prophets were no longer persecuted and put to death, but could again go about openly and continue the work begun by Elijah; they even had access to Ahab again. Still the conversion was by no means complete, but rather, being weak, it needed

support and strength from above if a complete relapse was to be prevented from setting in. This assistance came from the display of the power of Jehovah, a power which rescued in a time of great need and distress. The attack of the Syrian king, who had grown so mighty, threatened Ahab and his kingdom with destruction; at this crisis God, who never forsakes his people, who is merciful and gracious, long-suffering and abundant in goodness and truth (Ex 34:6), repeatedly grants them the victory, which was so extraordinary and wonderful that it could not possibly be ascribed to human power and strength, but only to God, to his might, his grace and truth. It was designed to make king and people unmistakably certain that it is not Baal, or any other god but the God Jehovah who doeth wonders, and declareth his strength among his people and redeemeth his people with a strong arm (Ps. 76:15). And in order that every one may know whence and from whom such a victory came, he caused it to be foretold by his servants the prophets. If ever anything could be, this double victory was designed to open the eyes of king and people and bring them to a recognition of the 'thus saith the Lord, I am Jehovah.' We have thus in this account not merely an ordinary history of wars, but a part of the divine history of salvation before us, which in an individual instance is what the entire history of Israel is in its completeness, namely, a display of the special dealings with a guidance of his people on God's part." (Lange.)

The Drunkenness of Ben-hadad. His drunkenness was both the index of his character and the cause of his defeat. He was insolent boastful and oppressive. These traits of character led him to abandon all human considerations for his foe and all ordinary precautions against attack. As he drank, these ugly traits of his disposition became aggravated to such an extent that he purposed to disregard the rights of an envoy, and

did permit the defeat of his army because he was no longer vigilant. The prophet Habakkuk gives a description of the effect of wine which describes Ben-hadad:—"Yea, moreover, wine is treacherous, a haughty man, that keepeth not at home; who enlargeth his desire as Sheol, and he is as death and cannot be satisfied, but gathered unto him all nations, and heapeth unto him all the peoples" (Hab. 2:5). It should be noted first of all that drunkenness destroys efficiency, and this was its effect on Ben-hadad. He had been a successful leader and had placed himself at the head of a great power, but in his drunken reveling his power fled from him.

Drinking Among Ancients. "In trying to form some notion of the drinking habits of the ancients it is necessary to keep certain facts in mind, facts pertaining to their time and status, and almost wholly absent from ours. The ancient mind, in its general tendency towards mysticism and away from materialism, revered all unexplained phenomena, worshiped all those numberless forces and force manifestations which it could not master or account for, and stood in awe before the, to them—yes, even to us—essentially veiled principle of intoxication. The drinking of fermented liquors was with them largely a religious rite; their banquets were even opened with propitiatory or grateful libations to the deities, while we use our numberless and highly alcoholized drinks as social and physical stimulants and anodynes. In a word, the fermented drinks of antiquity were but little adulterated, almost invariably diluted, and associated with a reverential, if undeveloped and mystic, worship." (Gustafson.)

Wine Destroys Efficiency. "Would that the youth, to whom the flavor of his first wine is delicious, could look into my desolation and be made to understand what a dreary thing it is when a man feels himself going down a precipice with open eyes and a passive will; to see his destruction and to have no

power to stop it, and yet to feel it, all the way, emanating from himself; to perceive all goodness emptied out of him, and yet not be able to forget a time when it was otherwise—to bear about the piteous spectacle of self-ruin!" (Charles Lamb's Confessions.)

"Unprejudiced and highly intelligent

men attribute the severe defeats in the last war with Germany (Franco-German) in no small degree to the disorder, want of discipline, and incapability of resistance which has been produced and nurtured in the French army by the predominant craving for drink in both military and civil life." (Dr. Baer.)

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What wholesome truth did king Lemuel learn from his mother about drinking wine? Prov. 31:4, 5.

2. What special reason did she give why kings should abstain? Prov. 31:5.

3. What does Isaiah say concerning them who rise up early and tarry late to drink wine? Isa. 5:11, 12.

4. What evils does Isaiah associate with the habit of drinking strong drink? Isa. 5:22, 23.

5. What did the same prophet declare

concerning the drunkards of Ephraim? Isa. 28:1, 3, 7, 8.

6. What particular sin is charged against Israel with reference to the Nazirites? Amos 2:12. Compare Numbers 6:1-3.

7. What is said of those who live luxuriously, put far away the evil day, sing idle songs, drink bowls of wine and are at ease in Zion? Amos 6:1-6.

8. What calamity did Amos say should befall the idle, gluttonous and drunken? Amos 6:7.

HELPFUL QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. How many kings were with Ben-hadad when he besieged Samaria? 1 Kings 20:1.

2. What message did he send to Ahab and what did Ahab reply? 1 Kings 20:2-4.

3. What second message did Ben-hadad send Ahab? 1 Kings 20:5, 6.

4. With who did Ahab then consult and what reply did he make? 1 Kings 20:7-9.

5. What was Ben-hadad's third message? 1 Kings 20:10.

6. What was Ahab's third and memorable reply? 1 Kings 20:11.

7. What was the king of Syria doing when Ahab's third reply came? 1 Kings 20:12.

8. What command did the king of Syria then give? 1 Kings 20:13.

9. What message did a certain prophet bring to Ahab at this time? 1 Kings 20:13.

10. What two questions did the king then ask? 1 Kings 20:14.

11. What was Ahab to "know" as the cause of victory? 1 Kings 20:13.

12. By whom would the Lord deliver the great army of Syria into Ahab's hand and what five things happened? 1 Kings 20:14.

13. What may we reasonably infer as to Israel's military strength at this time? 1 Kings 20:15.

14. What were Ben-hadad and his kings doing at noon? 1 Kings 20:16.

15. What order did Ben-hadad give and what five things happened? 1 Kings 20:18-20.

TEMPERANCE IN THE LIGHT OF NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING.

The New Testament throws a far brighter light upon the sin of drunkenness than does the Old Testament. Noah planted a vineyard and became drunken. Jesus consecrated wine at the wedding feast at Cana and in the Lord's Supper. Many liquor men have held up the use of wine by the Saviour at Cana as an example for its use in saloons. They forget that the spirit was entirely different. If Jesus were present with his blessing, showing forth his glory in the drinking places of men; were honored in them as he was honored at Cana; had his true disciples with him in such places; were to tell in such places of the hour of his atonement; were to throw the sanctity of sweet and obedient womanhood over it all, and such scenes could be described as that scene at Cana is described; and it could be said that in these modern drinking places Jesus manifests his glory and the people in them believe on him—if all these things could be said with reference to the saloons to-day they would be as wholesome as the churches, and might be turned fittingly into Bible class rooms, communion places and real trying places for good men and God.

But, at present, there is no similarity between Cana and the modern saloon, except that wine was used at Cana and is used in the saloon. At Cana it was used for the glory of God. In the saloon it is made the servitor of Satan. At Cana Jesus made wine to sanctify marriage. The brewers and distillers manufacture strong drink that leads to divorce, to misery in the home, to the degradation of manhood, to the destruction of boys, the downfall of women, to lust and murder. The manufacturers of strong drink have no more sympathy with the spirit of Cana than they have with the spirit of heaven.

Still another great Christian principle is to abstain from wine, or even from meat, or from anything whereby your brother might be caused to stumble. As in driving a carriage or automobile one must look out, not only for himself, but for others also, so must one, in his use of privileges which to himself alone might seem harmless. He must love his neighbor as himself, and be as careful not to cause his neighbor to stumble into sin as to abstain from sin on his own account.

REVIEW.

GOLDEN TEXT—Happy is that people whose God is the Lord. Ps. 144:15.

DAILY READINGS.

- Mch. 20.. M—1 Kings 12:1-24—The Kingdom Divided.
 1 Kings 12:25; 13:6—Jeroboam Makes Idols for Israel to Worship.
 Mch. 21... T—2 Chron. 15:1-15—Asa's Good Reign in Judah.
 1 Kings 16:15-33—Omri and Ahab Lead Israel into Greater Sin.
 Mch. 22.. W—2 Chron. 17:1-13.—Jehoshaphat's Good Reign in Judah.
 1 Kings 17:1-24—Elijah the Prophet Appears in Israel.
 Mch. 23.. T—1 Kings 18:1, 2, 17-40—Elijah's Victory Over the Prophets of Baal.
 1 Kings 18:41-19:21—Elijah's Flight and Return.
 Mch. 24... F—1 Kings 21:1-29—Elijah Meets Ahab in Naboth's Vineyard.
 2 Kings 2:1-18—Elijah Goes up by a Whirlwind Into Heaven.
 Mch. 25.. S—2 Kings 4:8-37—Elisha the Prophet Restores a Child to Life.
 Mch. 26... S—1 Kings 20:12-21—Defeat Through Drunkenness.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

The lessons of this quarter have given us the history of both Israel and Judah during a little less than the first century of their separate existence. The scenes of these lessons have not been limited to one part of the land, but there has been a constant shifting from city to city and from mountain to plain. The persons whose activity we have studied have traveled from Zarephath, in the territory of Sidon on the north, to Mount Horeb, in the wilderness of Sinai southward. East of the Jordan mention has been made of Gilead and Penuel, while the scene of one of our most striking lessons was Mount Carmel, the most western outpost of the land which abuts on the Great Sea. One of our tasks should be to get before us a clear conception of the size and character of the two countries whose history we are studying. Let us begin with Judah. The first impressive fact about it is its smallness. "Judah is very small. Even when you extend the surface to the promised border at the sea, and include all of it that is desert, it does not amount to more than 2,000 square miles, or the size of one of our

(English) average counties. But Judæa, in the days of its independence, never covered the whole Maratime Plain; and even the Shephelah (the western foothills), as we have seen, was frequently beyond it. Apart from Shephelah and Plain, Judæa was a region 55 miles long, from Bethel to Beersheba, and from 25 to 30 miles broad, or about 1350 square miles of which nearly the half was desert. It ought not to be difficult to convey an adequate impression of so small and so separate a province. The center is a high and broken tableland from two to three thousand feet above the sea, perhaps thirty-five miles long by twelve to seventeen broad. You will almost cover it by one sweep of the eye. But surrounding this center are borders and bulwarks of extraordinary variety and intricacy." (G A. Smith.) From the high tableland of the central range the land eastward sinks swiftly into the deep valley of the lower Jordan and the Dead Sea. From no point in Judæa can one get away from the presence of this great chasm. To the south the land merges gradually into the desert. On the west there lie

the Maritime Plain and the Sea, and to the north is the shifting border between Judah and Israel. This was the kingdom of Rehoboam, of Asa and of Jehoshaphat. In the lessons of the next quarter this land will be more prominent than it has been during the history of the last quarter.

Israel commenced on the south where Judah ended. On the east was the Sea. Northward the border line was in the hills of Galilee, shifting northward or southward with the varying strength and fortunes of it and its northern neighbors. Apart from the Maritime Plain, the valley of the Jordan and the trans-Jordanic region, this country is divided

by nature into three parts—the hills of Galilee, Mount Ephraim, and the Plain of Esdraelon between. The scenes connected with our lessons were located altogether in Mount Ephraim and the Plain of Esdraelon. Mount Ephraim is fairer and more open than Judæa. It consists mainly of hills, with broadening valley between. On the north lies the wide plain, almost thirty miles across and relatively level as a floor. In this region the fortunes of Jeroboam, of Baasha and of the house of Omri waxed and waned. By keeping these two regions before us, the historical and ethical significance of the events which we have studied will be made clearer.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

The separate existence of the two kingdoms began with the death of Solomon. In fact the disruption was founded upon the abuses of which he was guilty. Judah had grown rich at the expense of its northern sister, and the revolt was entirely in the interest of the northern tribes.

In the history studied during this quarter the northern kingdom bulks larger than Judah. This prominence of Israel is only partly real. During the first hundred years of their separate existence more stirring events are taking place in Israel. In Judah the history is quieter. But for that very reason that which is being achieved is more permanent. Samaria always took precedence over Jerusalem in good and evil alike. During this century Samaria has hastened in the path of evil, and its doom is not far distant. Judah is slowly maturing those forces which are to lay deep and sure the monotheism and the morality on which Christianity is to build. The history of Israel resounds with the voice of prophets, but their work is almost entirely in vain. The social and religious life of Samaria in the days of

Ahab has sunk far below that of David's time, and the lessons of this quarter show by what influence this degradation was brought about.

Lesson 1.—History of Israel and Judah.

Golden Text—Prov. 13:20.

Lesson Facts—Oppressed by the heavy taxation and service imposed by Solomon the northern tribes asked for relief from his son and successor, Rehoboam. This request was presented at Shechem, where he had gone to be crowned. The new king asked for time, and took counsel first of the aged counselors of his father and later of the young men who had been his companions. The former advised yielding to the demands of the people, but this advice Rehoboam rejected and acted on the policy outlined by the young men, which was to meet the demands of the people by more repressive measures. When this decision was announced to the assembly, a revolt broke out at once and the ten northern tribes completely separated themselves from Rehoboam and David's line. Rehoboam made two grave mistakes. He yielded to foolish advice, and he ignored God.

The demand of the ten tribes can not be regarded as other than just, though less violent action coupled with continued agitation might have secured for them such relief from burdens as they sought.

Lesson II.—Jeroboam Makes Idols for Israel to Worship.

Golden Text—Exodus 20:4.

Lesson Facts—The faction that revolted from the authority of Rehoboam chose for their leader and king a member of the tribe of Ephraim named Jeroboam. He had been guilty of some indiscretion during the reign of Solomon which compelled him to flee to Egypt, but on receiving tidings of Solomon's death, he returned and was selected king of the northern kingdom. His first task, as he saw it, was to arrange such a policy as would make the separation between the two kingdoms permanent. The political separation was already complete, but the religion afforded a bond of union which as yet was unaffected by the revolution. Jeroboam feels that this must be severed also, and this he proceeds to do by establishing sites of worship to Jehovah at Bethel and Dan. The two places are chosen because of their past history. He does not stop, however, with the mere resolution that Jehovah is to be worshiped in these places, but, in imitation of Aaron, makes calves of gold and decreed that these were to be accepted as the symbols of Jehovah. In doing this Jeroboam expressly violated the command of the Law, and furthermore he set on foot an influence which led the people deeper and deeper into idolatry and sin.

Lesson III.—Asa's Good Reign in Judah.

Golden Text—2 Chron. 15:7.

Lesson Facts—The reign of Rehoboam had been unfavorable in its influence to the true religion. During this and the succeeding reign many idolatrous

practices and institutions had gained a firm hold in Judah. The third king of Judah was Asa, and he was a good king. His reign was characterized by laudable efforts to suppress idolatry and re-establish in its purity the worship of Jehovah. A leader in this movement was Azariah, who encouraged the king in his good work. Asa, as a result, still more thoroughly purified the land, carrying his reforms up into the territory of Israel. He also renewed the altar of the temple. He then called an assembly of all of those of both kingdoms who worshiped Jehovah, and with sacrifices and universal rejoicing a solemn covenant of loyalty and devotion to Jehovah was entered into.

Lesson IV.—Omri and Ahab Lead Israel Into Greater Sin.

Golden Text—Prov. 14:34.

Lesson Facts—After Jeroboam's reign the course of Israel hastened rapidly towards anarchy and rebellion. An inefficient king was quickly despatched by some ambitious man who, by means of murder, exalted himself to the throne. Three such royal murders and a civil war had stained the history of Israel, when at length Omri securely seated himself on the throne. He was an able ruler from a political point of view, though his wars were not always successful. His one enduring monument was the establishment of the capital of the country at Samaria. Religiously, however, he was no improvement over his predecessors. He continued the worship introduced by Jeroboam, and even favored idolatry. He was succeeded by his son, Ahab, who was thoroughly bad. His wife was Jezebel, a daughter of the king of Sidon and priest of Baal. Under her leadership idolatry was introduced into Israel, and for a time the worship of Jehovah was under persecution. This was the logical outcome of Jeroboam's innovations.

Lesson V—Jehoshaphat's Good Reign in Judah.

Golden Text—Matthew 6:33.

Lesson Facts—Asa was succeeded by another pious king, who established still more firmly the reforms of Asa. He fortified and garrisoned his kingdom, protecting it especially against any encroachment from Israel. Whatever of idolatrous worship or institutions had survived his father's reforms he now removed, and in the third year of his reign instituted a system of popular religious instruction which was intended to give the opportunity to every member of his kingdom to know the law thoroughly. In this great enterprise Jehoshaphat employed both civil and religious officers. The princes were commended to have oversight, while the actual instruction was given by priests and Levites. Politically, Jehoshaphat prospered also. He was respected by his neighbors, and the Philistines and Arabians paid him tribute. His reign was entirely prosperous, and this was accented by the ancients as the clearest proof of Jehovah's favor.

Lesson VI—Elijah the Prophet Appears in Israel.

Golden Text—Ps. 34:10.

Lesson Facts—This lesson introduces us to one of the striking characters of the Old Testament. Without any explanation as to his previous history or prophetic call, Elijah the Tishbite is introduced, and his first speech is equally startling. It is that, except at his word, there shall be neither rain nor dew for a period of years in Israel. After this announcement he withdraws and remains in concealment while the land languishes in drought and famine. His first place of concealment is in one of the narrow torrent valleys which flow into the river Jordan. Here for something like a year he remains and is miraculously fed by the ravens, who bring him food. At the

end of that time falling water sent him forth, and he was directed to seek asylum with a widow of Zarephath, a city of Sidon. Elijah found the woman, but she was on the verge of starvation, for her food supply was all but exhausted. He and her family also were miraculously provided for in that her supply of meal and oil was made unfailing. In this way God protected his prophet until it was time for him to go forth to manifest Jehovah's power.

Lesson VII—Elijah's Victory over the Prophets of Baal.

Golden Text—Josh. 24:15.

Lesson Facts.—After the drought mentioned in the previous lesson had lasted for three and a half years, Elijah came forth from his retreat and ordered Ahab to summon all Israel to Mount Carmel and to bring there especially the prophets of Baal. When all had gathered he demanded of the people that they decide between Jehovah and Baal. They at first gave no answer, but when he proposed a contest to decide between the two, and offered conditions that were manifestly fair, the people decided for the contest. The four hundred prophets of Baal prepared an altar for their god, placed wood and victim upon it and then prayed for fire from heaven. Though they prayed until the middle of the afternoon, no answer came. Then Elijah prepared the altar of Jehovah, placed wood and victim upon it, and then, to disarm suspicion, had twelve jars of water poured over the altar. In answer to his prayer fire came from heaven and the people adjudged the contest by declaring "Jehovah is God." The prophets of Baal were then taken to the Kishon below and there slain.

Lesson VIII—Elijah's Flight and Return.

Golden Text—Isaiah 40:31.

Lesson Facts—After the contest Elijah went with Ahab to Jezreel, but that very night he received a message from Jezebel

that she would slay him before the morrow had past. Partly from fear of her, and partly from the result of the reaction from over-excitement, Elijah fled through Judah and the desert to Mount Horeb. Here he took refuge in a cave, and was told by the Lord to go and stand on the mountainside. There appeared before the eyes of the prophet a series of manifestations of power. First a wind rent the mountain side, then an earthquake shook it, and then a fire, but the prophet felt that Jehovah was in none of these. Then came a still small voice, and Jehovah's presence was in this. In this way the Lord taught the prophet that thus he works, and he sent him back to work for God, not by such spectacular exhibitions as that which had been given on Carmel, but by means of ordinary human influences.

Lesson IX—Elijah Meets Ahab in Naboth's Vineyard.

Golden Text—Luke 12:15.

Lesson Facts—Ahab desired to extend his palace grounds and tried to purchase the vineyard of Naboth, but he refused to sell it. Ahab was greatly depressed by this refusal, but Jezebel undertook the task of securing it for him. She proclaimed an assembly, and hired witnesses who came before it and testified that Naboth had cursed God and the king. For this pretended crime Naboth and his sons were stoned. Ahab went at once to take possession of the vineyard, but there he was met by Elijah. The prophet denounced Ahab for this crime, declaring that he had utterly sold himself to iniquity. He predicted that retribution should overtake him, and that both he and Jezebel should be slain and their bodies cast out into the open field. In this the prophet speaks as a representative of the people and of God, and denounces Ahab for his crime against Naboth and the nation.

Lesson X—Elijah Goes up by a Whirlwind into Heaven.

Golden Text—Gen. 5:24.

Lesson Facts—The end of Elijah's prophetic career and life came at last. To him it was communicated by the Lord that he was to depart. He starts from Gilgal of the highlands and travels to Bethel. He urges Elisha to stay behind, but he refuses. At Bethel a company of prophets are met who came to know, probably through Elijah himself, that he was about to depart. This they communicate to Elisha, but he commands silence. Then the two travel to Jericho, where the same thing is repeated. From Jericho the two go to the Jordan, watched by the sons of the prophets. Elijah rolls his mantle together and strikes the water of the river. They cross on dry ground and journey further, holding conversation as they go. Suddenly a chariot and horses of fire drive between the companions, and a whirlwind carries Elijah upward. Elisha made an exclamation which shows that he esteemed Elijah as his own spiritual father and the protector of Israel. He took up Elijah's mantle which had fallen, and carried it back with him, a sign that Elijah's spirit rested upon him.

Lesson XI—Elisha the Prophet Restores a Child to Life.

Golden Text—Rom. 6:23.

Lesson Facts—Elisha as a prophet journeyed to and fro through the land. On one journey he passed through Shunem, where he is hospitably entertained by a wealthy and pious woman. Since his travels took the prophet that way often, the woman prepared and furnished a chamber for his use on the top of her house. Elisha, by way of reward, offered to commend her to the king or chief captain, but this she refused. He then told

her that she should have a son, for she was childless. In due time the child came and grew to be quite a lad. In the harvest field it was stricken with sun-stroke, and in a few hours died. The mother laid the child on the prophet's bed and hastened to him in the confident belief that he could give her some comfort. He sent his servant with his staff to lay upon the child, while he and the mother followed more leisurely. No result was produced by the servant, however, but in response to the prophet's prayers the child was restored to life.

Lesson XII—Defeat through Drunkenness.

Golden Text—Prov. 31:4.

Lesson Facts—Ben-hadad, king of Damascus, invaded the kingdom of Ahab and

invested him in his capital city. With characteristic oriental insolence he demanded of Ahab his wealth and harem. These Ahab was willing to grant, but when he further demanded the right to search the palaces of Ahab and his nobles for choice possessions, his demand was refused. Both sides prepared for the conflict. A prophet encouraged Ahab with a promise of victory. He prepared a small but chosen army to deliver an attack upon the Syrian army. The result was that a sudden panic seized the army of Ben-hadad, and all took to flight. The king himself barely escapes with the horsemen. The reason for this complete victory for Ahab was that Ben-hadad, in his over-confidence, had given himself over to drunkenness, and in his reveling all of the leaders of the army joined.

REVIEW QUESTIONS FOR THE FIRST QUARTER.

Lesson 1.

1. What conspicuous blunder was committed by Rehoboam?
2. What, however, had God foretold to Solomon as to the rending of the kingdom?

Lesson 2.

1. Who was the first king of the ten tribes and how did his reign come about?
2. What great sin did he commit, and how was he punished for the same?

Lesson 3.

1. What message did the prophet Azariah bring to Asa, when made king of Judah?
2. What was the character of Asa? Of his reign?

Lesson 4.

1. What is said of the wickedness of Omri, king of Israel?
2. Who succeeded Omri and how long did he reign?

Lesson 5.

1. About what good king of Judah are we told in lesson five?
2. How did God honor his obedience?

Lesson 6.

1. Who foretold the three and one-half years drought in Israel?
2. Where and how was he sustained until the rain in Israel?

Lesson 7.

1. Whom did Elijah first meet upon his return to Israel? What had the person done?
2. What did Elijah command king Ahab to do? Why did he obey?

Lesson 8.

1. What occurred upon Mount Carmel, and why?
2. Where did Elijah go after the victory on Carmel, and why?

Lesson 9.

1. What caused the trouble between king Ahab and Naboth? What was the result?

2. Give a brief estimate of the character of Jezebel.

Lesson 10.

1. Tell how the mutual friendship began between Elijah and Elisha and how it continued.

2. Tell of the departure of Elijah and the steps that led up to it.

Lesson 11.

1. What woman showed hospitality to the prophet Elisha and what favors did Jehovah grant her through the prophet?

2. In what respect, particularly, did Elisha differ from Elijah?

Lesson 12.

1. What natural cause is given for the defeat of Ben-hadad by Ahab?

2. What should be the attitude of the church toward the liquor traffic?

3. Why do you think the temperance cause is making rapid progress to-day?

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. Solomon, having sowed the seeds of disunion, is spared the sorrow of reaping the harvest. His son reaps the harvest. But it was not for Solomon's, but for David's sake. To us there is a greater than David, in whose name or for whose sake we may be saved.

2. God works all things "together for good to them that love God," despite the follies and sins of men. Division was better than hopeless corruption.

3. Jeroboam's notion of convenience prevails in the world to-day. "It is too hot!" "It is too cold!" "It is too far!" "You have gone long enough to the Sunday-school!" Make God first, as Jesus did, as Paul did, and be safe.

4. Men go into idolatry by degrees; from calves to Baal. All the idolatry is not in the past, not among the heathen, not spectacular, not dependent upon hideous images. "Covetousness, which is idolatry," is common even in the churches. The last words of John's first epistle—"Little children, guard yourselves from idols"—are appropriate to us and others now.

5. God's hatred of idolatry is not that it supersedes him, but that, in superseding him it deceives and destroys the soul and the nation. Idolatry is to believe and practice a lie. It is to worship a lie instead of the Truth.

6. As the prophet told Asa and the people: "Jehovah is with you while you are with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you," so, but in different words, Jesus taught his disciples in the 15th chapter of John, concerning the vine and its branches.

7. The kings of Israel—Jeroboam, Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, Ahab—come and go in rapid succession! They were all wicked. Asa and Jehoshaphat abide. Long life and outward prosperity are not always signs of divine favor. Jesus was a man of sorrows, with no place to lay his head; rejected of men, crucified, but gave his soul as an offering for sin; to whom, at last, is given the name above every name, at which every knee shall bow.

8. Ahab and Jezebel! Unholy pair! Woman at her worst! She is bad because her god is bad. Ahab could not serve two masters—God and Baal. Marriage ought to be a glorious blessing. There can be no true marriage except between the good and the true, the wise and the loving. In considering the marriage relation, remember that only those whom God joins are well joined. If unhappily married, seek happiness and grace in God, and seek to lead your unbelieving partner into fellowship with Christ. 1 Cor. 7:12-16,

SUGGESTIVE OUTLINE OF THE LESSONS FOR THE FIRST QUARTER.

Lesson No. 1.—January 1.

A GREAT REVOLUTION.

1. *Causes that led to it.*
It was not sudden.
Jealousy toward David.
Solomon's sins.
God's plan of development.
2. *Immediate causes.*
Israel's request refused.
Threat of greater tyranny.
Jeroboam's eligibility.
Intimation of God's will.
3. *God's mercy in it all.*
Shown for David's sake.
Plan of God for Christ's sake.
Great promise to Jeroboam.
4. *Both leaders found wanting.*
God is ever faithful.
God overrules evil.

Lesson No. 2.—January 8.

PLANNING WITHOUT GOD.

1. *Fortifications without faith.*
At Shechem; at Penuel.
2. *Jeroboam's worldly purpose.*
To break religious bond.
To attach Israel to himself.
To solidify his kingdom.
3. *The sin of it all.*
He rejected God's promise.
He transgressed his commands.
He made Israel to sin.
He set up idolatry.
He lost life's opportunity.

Lesson No. 3.—January 15.

ASA'S GOOD REIGN IN JUDAH.

1. *The great difference in men.*
Not due to heredity.
Not due to luck.
Not due to environment.
2. *Even darkest days had great men.*
Not the great amount of light.
But the great fidelity to the light.

3. *Wherein Asa showed greatness.*
The outward proof of it.
The inward secret of it.

4. *Asa's decline.*
Its extent.
Its cause.
Its effect.

Lesson No. 4.—January 22.

OMRI, AHAB AND JEZEBEL.

1. *The darkness deepens fast.*
God is forgotten.
Worldliness is dominant.
2. *Three desperately wicked ones.*
The outward scene changes for the better; the inward waxes worse.
The wickedest king is excelled by a wicked woman.
A plunge into the foulest idolatry is a plunge into direst disaster.
3. *The only way to success is the way they did not take.*
It is the way of the first Psalm.
It is the way of Matthew 6:33.
It is the same way of 1 Tim. 4:8.
4. *Our comfort is that our King is Good, and is willing and able to teach us, lead us and deliver us out of sin.*

Lesson No. 5.—January 29.

JEHOSHAPHAT'S GOOD REIGN IN JUDAH.

1. *A good son of a good father.*
—against foes within and without.
A wise son of a wise father.
2. *He strengthened himself in God.*
He strengthened himself against foes.
He refused Baal, but sought God.
His faith obtained the promise.
He began wise and wide teaching.
3. *Because he feared God the nations feared him and his God also.*
His example shines like a brilliant star illumined of God.

Lesson No. 6.—February 5.

ELIJAH THE PROPHET APPEARS.

1. *Elijah comes suddenly on the scene.*
A great man of God, trusts God.
His mission is needed; a crisis.
God's law is dishonored; great danger.
2. *Elijah confronts Ahab.*
A brief message, but big in meaning.
An unwelcome message, but sure.
An authoritative, but vital one.
3. *Elijah by the brook Cherith.*
Benefit of retirement.
Simplicity of life.
Communion with God.
Safe from enemies without.
Overcoming foes within.
4. *Elijah at Zarephath.*
God honors a poor widow—often.
God has scattered servants.
His servants are in many strange places.
Faith, joy, sorrow. God trusted and good.

Lesson No. 7.—February 12.

ELIJAH'S VICTORY ON CARMEL

1. *The one true God against the false.*
2. *The one true prophet against the many.*
3. *Both sides are eager for the great test.*
4. *The god of fire is beaten by fire.*
5. *The quiet prophet against raging priests.*
6. *The great decision in Israel.* (Golden Text.)
7. *The necessary destruction of corrupters.*

Lesson No. 8.—February 19.

GOD'S MAN OF THE MOUNTAINS.

1. *Mount Carmel after Cherith and Zarephath.*

2. *Mount Horeb, after Jezebel's threat and the juniper tree.*

3. *Mount Hermon, with Christ, after a thousand years in glory.*

4. *Mount Zion, with all the redeemed, worshipping the Lamb, the Lion of Judah.*

Lesson No. 9.—February 26.

AHAB AND JEZEBEL, GOD AND NABOTH.

1. *The sin of covetousness.*
It blinds to true riches.
It makes one unhappy.
It makes one unreasonable.
It leads to evil conspiracy.
"Covetousness is idolatry."
2. *The sin of judicial murder.*
Jezebel, bad and strong, helps Ahab, who was bad and weak.
She dared to execute his desire.
Naboth was loyal to the law of God.
He was a national patriot, and true.
Nobles and husband obey the sorceress.
3. *The just and terrible accusation.*
Elijah acted as the nation's conscience.
The king, blinded, called friend an enemy.
God will find and confront every sinner.
Guilt, however shared, can not be shifted.
4. *A righteous but merciful God.*
He sought to guide the nation.
He warned Ahab and sought to save him.
He helped him, that he might know him.
He respected Ahab's meager penitence.

Lesson No. 10.—March 5.

ELIJAH TRANSLATED.

1. *Exceptional transitions.*
Enoch, Elijah and our Lord.
Manifold miracles, easy to believe, if

worthy, since Jesus rose from Joseph's tomb.

The greater permits the lesser and makes it credible.

2. *God provides a faithful successor.*
Elisha's zeal, gentleness, affection.
He is endowed with Elijah's spirit.
Elijah had been anxious about the reformation. "The Lord will provide."
3. *Necessity of the spirit of Christ.*
Elisha has a season of preparation.
Apostles must tarry for the Spirit.
Only disciples saw Jesus ascend.
Only Elisha saw Elijah.

Lesson No. 11.—March 12.

ELISHA RESTORES A CHILD TO LIFE.

1. *A great successor to a great man.*
Elijah's influence abides.
A faithful servant becomes a master.
A quieter worker, but a great work.
A worker taken, but the work goes on.
A prophet is God's representative.
2. *The man of God in a quiet home.*
Hospitality shown to the prophet.
The woman discovers his character.
Her hospitality is rewarded.
Jesus desires to dwell in people's homes.
3. *A double miracle of mercy.*
A child is given from God.
A sad loss and great grief.
The dead child is fully restored.
Miracles not now necessary to faith.
Jesus' resurrection is the great door to the realm of miracles.
The moral, more than the physical character of a miracle should attract us.

Lesson No. 12.—March 19.

TEMPERANCE LESSON.

1. *General temperance teaching in the Old Testament dispensation.*
(See Preliminary Questions—lesson 12.)
Many a defeat has been suffered thus.
2. *The battle lost through strong drink.*
Commercial corporations will not employ drinking servants.
Even saloons seek sober barkeepers.
Insurance companies refuse drunkards.
Wise girls will not marry drinkers.
Men need all the strength, money, and reputation they forfeit through strong drink.
3. *The New Testament principles are clearly opposed to strong drink.*
(See Practical Suggestions.)

Lesson No. 13.—March 26.

REVIEW OF THE FIRST QUARTER.

1. *Kings in Judah and Israel from Rehoboam to Ahab.*
The bad in the majority.
Jehoshaphat the best.
Ahab the worst of all.
2. *The prophets in Judah and Israel from Ahijah to Elijah.*
The wicked the kings the greater the prophets.
The good in the majority.
Elijah the greatest.
Ahab hated true prophets and lying prophets were sent to him.
3. *Withal, the people are making progress.*
The lesson of Carmel was not lost.
The schools of the prophets increase.
Great is God's mercy; great his design.

CLASS RECORD

Class No.....

Teacher

[illegible]

ORDER OF EXERCISES

At the 2 o'clock Department of Social Science School,
Washington, D. C.

Invocation of Spirit

Song to the Nation

Prayer (Everybody Prays) of the Department

No. 1 of Officers and Members who are not seated standing as
their names are called, concluding with

General Prayer, the Prayer of the Lord's Prayer

Song, by the School.

Reading of the Lesson (Lesson) was (1) the Department of
Education or (2) a Lesson or (3) a Department, or (4), each
Department read a Verse.

Prayer of the members of each other person

Song "Forward, Christian Nation" Every one took verses as
written in their respective books for recitation.

Particular Prayer

Intercessory Prayer with the members present on

Every Member Took to the Pastor or Superintendent of the work of
some of the members of your the School

Song to the Nation

Prayer of School At the Teachers standing who had every member
in the class present

Announcements

Secretary's Report

"Not out of School" that is everybody should who was here last
Sunday This is very different of "last Sunday" was a rally
day

Closing Song all standing

Benediction.

1911—SECOND QUARTER.—1911

Lesson 1.

April 2.

ELISHA HEALS NAAMAN THE SYRIAN.

2 Kings 5. (Print 2 Kings 5:1-14.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Look unto me, and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth: for I am God, and there is none else. Isaiah 45:22.

Memory Verses—13, 14. **Suggested Readings**—2. Kings 3-5. **Time**—About 897 B. C. **Persons**—Naaman, a little maiden, King of Syria, King of Israel, Elisha, servants of Naaman. **Places**—The river Jordan and Abanah and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus.

DAILY READINGS.

Mch. 27.... M—2 Kings 5:1-7—Naaman's Journey.

Mch. 28.... T—2 Kings 5:8-14—Naaman's Cleansing.

Mch. 29.... W—2 Kings 5:15-27—Gehazi Punished with Naaman's Leprosy.

Mch. 30.... T—Luke 4:16-30—Elisha sent only to Naaman the Syrian.

Mch. 31.... F—Num. 12:1-15—The Leprosy of Miriam.

April 1.... S—2 Chron. 26:16-23—The Leprosy of Uzziah.

April 2.... S—Mark 1:40-45—Jesus Healing a Leper.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

The Jordan.—"Among the rivers of the world the Jordan is unique by a two-fold distinction of nature and history. There are hundreds of other streams more large, more useful, or more beautiful; there is none which has been more spoken about by mankind. Other rivers have awakened a richer poetry in the peoples through whom thy pass—for the references to Jordan in the Bible are very few, and, with two or three exceptions, prosaic—but of none has the music sounded so far, or so pleasantly, across the world.

"There may be something on the surface of another planet to match the Jordan Valley; there is nothing on this. No other part of our earth, uncovered by water, sinks to 3000 feet below the

level of the ocean. But here we have a rift more than one hundred and sixty miles long and from two to fifteen broad, which falls from the sea-level to as deep as 1,292 feet below it at the coast of the Dead Sea, while the bottom of the latter is 1,300 feet deeper still." (G. A. Smith.)

But these facts about the Jordan, which have impressed the modern mind, were either unknown or unappreciated by the ancients. To one who lived outside of Israel the Jordan would seem to be what it really is when shorn of its religious associations, an unwholesome and unlovely stream. It was probably near Bethshan, or below this point, that Naaman visited it, and the writer quoted above describes it there as fol-

lows: "Penetrating this unhealthy hollow you come soon to the Jordan itself. Remember that it is but a groove in the bottom of an old sea-bed, a ditch as deep below the level of the ocean as some of our coal mines are, and you will be prepared for the uncouthness of the scene. There is no yellow marl by the river itself. Those heaps and ridges, which, in higher parts of the valley, look like nothing but the refuse of a chemical manufactory, have here all been washed away. But there are hardly less ugly mudbanks, from two to twenty-five feet high, with an occasional bed of shingle, that is not clean and sparkling as in our own rivers, but foul with ooze and slime. Dead driftwood is everywhere in sight. Large trees lie about, overthrown; and the exposed roots and lower trunks of the trees still standing are smeared with mud, except where they have been recently torn by passing wreckage. There are, however, some open spaces, where the river flashes to the hills above and an easy path is possible to its edge. But in the lower reaches this is mostly where the earth is too salt to sustain vegetation, and so it may be said that the Jordan sweeps to the Dead Sea through unhealthy jungles, relieved only by poisonous soil." (G. A. Smith.)

The Abanah and Pharpar.—"The main source of the beauty and fertility of the

plain of Damascus is the river Barada, the Chrysorrhoas of the ancients. It rises in the high plain south of Zebedany or Anti-Lebanon, where I afterwards visited its fountains, and rushes in a southeasterly course down the mountain, till it issues at Mezzeh from its chasm upon the plain. Here it turns eastward, and, flowing along the north wall of the city, takes its way across the plain to the two northern lakes. It is difficult to estimate the quantity of water brought down by this river to the plain, but it is very great. It is a deep, broad, rushing, mountain stream, and although not less than nine or ten branches are taken from it, some of them quite large, for the supply of the city and the plain, yet it still flows on as a large stream and enters the middle lake by two channels. The water is limpid and beautiful.

"The second river, the Pharpar, would then be the A'waj, which indeed is the only other independent stream of any size within the territory of Damascus. It is formed by the junction of several smaller streams at or near Sa'sa'. . . It meanders through the meadow-like plain to enter the southern lake not far south of the village of Heijany. Its waters, however, do not always reach the lake. In November, 1852, its channel was entirely dry below the peaks of Mania." (Robinson.)

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.

This lesson is another of the isolated events which make up the life of Elisha. It is not connected by any temporal adverb with either that which precedes it or that which follows. It is impossible to determine exactly whether it belongs to the time of Jehoram or Jehu. The

only light obtainable on this question is from the fact that Syria and Israel were not at this time hostile (vs. 5, 7) and since Hazael, king of Damascus, waged war against Jehu (2 Kings 10:32-33), it seems most probable that this incident occurred during the reign of Jehoram.

1 Now Naaman, captain of the host of the king of Syria, was a great man with his master, and honorable, because by him Jehovah had given victory unto Syria: he was also a mighty man of valor, *but he was a leper.* 2 And the Syrians had gone out in bands, and had

brought away captive out of the land of Israel a little maiden; and she waited on Naaman's wife. 3 And she said unto her mistress, Would that my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! then would he recover him of his leprosy. 4 And one went in, and told his lord,

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 1. Captain of the host: This made him the first man in importance after the king in Syria. Cf. 4:13. **Honorable:** This means one who was favorably regarded by the king. The reason for this is given in the next clause. **Jehovah had given victory to Syria:** This is not to be understood as meaning that Jehovah had turned against Israel and was giving the victory to its enemy. Damascus had been successful in war. It stood at the head of a great confederacy (1 Kings 20:1). Naaman had contributed a considerable part in achieving its victories. In accordance with the conception that Jehovah is God of all the earth and, with the usual representation of the Scriptures, that all things, whether good or bad, are attributable to him, it is here represented that Naaman's victories were a dispensation of his providence. The Jewish rabbis fancied that the victory here referred to was that over Ahab, and so affirmed that Naaman was the man who "drew a bow at a venture" and smote Ahab (1 Kings 22:34). For this there is no foundation. This victory probably refers to no one battle, but to Syrian military successes in general. These had been won by Ben-hadad, who is the king of Syria referred to in this verse. But the Hebrew word which is here translated "victory," really means salvation or deliverance. About this time, as we learn from their monuments, an Assyrian monarch pushed his conquest as far as Syria, but he gained no permanent advantage. It is not im-

probable that the victory gained by Naaman was over this mighty foe. **A leper:** It is manifest that the Syrians did not confine lepers so closely as did Israelites. It is probable that this disorder of Naaman was some milder form of the ancient leprosy and not identical with the modern disease called by this name. Modern leprosy quite early in its course would have incapacitated him for his duties. See Introduction.

2. The Syrians had gone out in bands: This refers to plundering parties who took spoil from their neighbors. That this was not an infrequent mode of warfare is evident from 6:23 and 13:20. The tense of the verb shows that this belonged to the past, though later the war was renewed. **Waited on:** Margin, *Was before:* See 1 Kings 12:6 and note on this verse in lesson for January 1.

3. The prophet that is in Samaria: This means in the city of Samaria, where he had a house, according to 5:9 and 6:32. This verse is proof of the wide fame which Elisha had. **Would he recover him of his leprosy:** The Hebrew verb means literally, *may be received.* The same word is used in Num. 12:14 of Miriam and is there translated *shall be brought in again.* It shows that the maiden had the Israelite's conception of leprosy, a disease which barred from society. Its cure meant restoration to the rights of citizenship.

4. One went in: The margin, *She went in,* is better. Naaman's wife told him what the maiden had said and he

saying, Thus and thus said the maiden that is of the land of Israel. 5 And the king of Syria said, Go now, and I will send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, and six thousand *pieces* of gold, and ten changes of raiment. 6 And he brought the letter to the king of Israel, saying, And now when this letter is come unto thee, behold, I have sent Naaman my servant to thee, that thou mayest recover him of his leprosy. 7 And it came to pass, when the king of Israel had read the letter, that he

rent his clothes, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man doth send unto me to recover a man of his leprosy? but consider, I pray you, and see how he seeketh a quarrel against me.

8 And it was so, when Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had rent his clothes, that he sent to the king, saying, Wherefore hast thou rent thy clothes? let him come now to me, and he shall know that there is a prophet in Israel. 9 So Naaman came with his horses and with his chariots, and

told the king. His lord: The king of Syria, Ben-hadad.

5. Go now: This exclamation implies haste. The king is willing to do anything to secure the cure of his leading man. I will send a letter: Proof that the kings were at peace. Ten talents of silver: On the value of a talent of silver see 1 Kings 16:24 and the note on that verse in the lesson for January 22. According to the calculation there made, the ten talents of Naaman would equal about \$18,000. Six thousand pieces of gold: The reading of the margin should be adopted, which has *shekels* instead of *pieces*. The value of the shekel, whether gold or silver, at that time is unknown. Adopting the value of the Maccabean silver shekel, which was 60 cents and the supposed ratio of the value of gold to silver as 10 to 1, these 6,000 gold shekels would be worth \$36,000. Naaman carried with him about \$54,000. Ten changes of raiment: Orientals are fond of frequent changes of raiment. Garments were often included in summaries of wealth and given as presents. Gen. 45:22; 2 Chron. 9:24.

6. Brought the letter to the king of Israel: The king of Syria thought that the prophet was attached to the court

of the king of Israel, who could at once summon him to Naaman's aid. And now, etc.: But one sentence of the letter is quoted. This is shown by the fact that it begins with *and*.

7. Rent his clothes: To express alarm and terror, which rending the garments did, as well as to denote grief. Am I God? etc.: It seems strange that the king did not at once think of Elisha. No better example is to be found of the Saviour's proverb, "A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country." Seeketh a quarrel: The margin is better; he seeketh an occasion of quarrel. That is, a special reason for a quarrel in addition to the ordinary one of national enmity. It is the stronger who seeks ground for a quarrel, and from Jehoram's words we draw the conclusion that he was afraid of Ben-hadad and thought him to be the stronger.

8. He shall know, etc.: There is an implied reproach to the king of Israel. The king of Syria, though a foreigner and living far away, shall know that of which you seem to be ignorant.

9. With his horses and with his chariots: These are mentioned to bring out the pomp with which he came and the indifference with which the prophet seemed to treat him. Door of the house

stood at the door of the house of Elisha. 10 And Elisha sent a messenger unto him, saying, Go and wash in the Jordan seven times, and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean. 11 But Naaman was wroth, and went away, and said, Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me, and stand, and call on the name of Jehovah his God, and wave his hand over the place, and recover the leper. 12 Are not Abanah and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? may

I not wash in them, and be clean? So he turned and went away in a rage. 13 And his servants came near, and spake unto him, and said, My father, if the prophet had bid thee do some great thing, wouldest thou not have done it? how much rather then, when he saith to thee, Wash, and be clean? 14 Then went he down, and dipped *himself* seven times in the Jordan, according to the saying of the man of God; and his flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child, and he was clean.

(American Standard Revised Version. Copyright, 1901, by Thomas Nelson & Sons.)

of Elisha: He has been mentioned as being in many places, but now for the first time we learn that he lived in Samaria. How unlike Elijah in manner of life and work!

10. **Sent a messenger unto him:** He did not refrain from meeting Naaman because he was a leper, but to teach him a lesson. This was that the prophet and his God did not regard his person, though he greatly esteemed himself (v. 11), and that he might not infer that it was through any magical power that the prophet possessed that he was cured. **Go and wash in the Jordan:** Naaman knew that the Jordan had no curative power for leprosy. This was a test of faith and at this he hesitates.

11. **He will surely come out to me:** The Orientals are punctilious as to how visits are to be paid and received. Elisha must have violated this code, and his actions seemed uncivil to Naaman. **Jehovah his God:** He had the conception that Jehovah was a local God. **Wave his hand over the place:** Much as did

those who exercised magical rites.

12. **Better than all the waters of Israel:** In this Naaman was certainly correct. See the Geographical Notes. **May I not wash in them?** etc.: Naaman argues that since washing is to effect his cure, the better the water the more certain the cure. Yet in doing this he certainly ignores the fact known to him that this was only a test of faith. In his rage, as men always do, he argued clumsily.

13. **His servants:** Not necessarily menials, but probably persons of rank, just as Naaman was servant of the king (v. 6). **My father:** An unusual title for a superior. Probably it expresses affection as much as superiority. **Some great thing:** Some pilgrimage, or the building of a temple, or such other things as men do for their gods.

14. **Went he down:** The valley of the Jordan was almost 2,000 feet below Samaria. **The flesh of a little child:** It was superior therefore to that of an ordinary man.

COMMENTS.

Leprosy.—"According to the Levitical patches on the skin, the hair on which text, the characteristic features of leprosy were: (1) Bright white spots or patches below the level of the surround-

ing skin; (3) the existence of 'quick raw flesh;' (4) the spreading of the scab or scall.

"There are two forms of modern leprosy—the tubercular or nodular, and the anæsthetic, or nervous; generally both forms are present. The nodular form begins, as a rule, as round or irregular-shaped spots, commonly of a mahogany or sepia color. These often disappear, and are followed by the appearance of nodules. In an advance stage the face is covered with firm, livid nodular elevations; the nose, lips and ears are swollen beyond their natural size, the eyelashes and eyebrows are lost, and the eyes are staring; the whole producing a hideous disfigurement. As the disease progresses, insensibility of the skin and paralysis ensue, and the fingers and toes may rot away.

"In the biblical description one is immediately impressed by the absence of all allusion to the hideous facial deformity, the loss of feeling, and the rotting of the members. If such conspicuous manifestations had existed they could not possibly have escaped observation. The Levitical code prescribed that the several examinations of the person suspected should be made at intervals of seven days, thus enabling the priest to note the progress of the disease. Leprosy is an exceedingly slow disease, particularly in the beginning, and a fortnight would show absolutely no change in the vast majority of cases. Moreover, the 'Lepra Hebræorum' was a curable disease. When the leper was cured the priest made an atonement before the Lord, and expiatory sacrifices in the form of a sin offering and a trespass offering were made also. Modern leprosy is, except in isolated instances, incurable.

"The probabilities are that biblical leprosy comprised a number of diseases of the skin, which, owing to the undevel-

oped state of medical science at that period, were not distinguished. The white spots, upon which so much diagnostic stress was laid, were in all likelihood those of vitiligo, a disease quite common in tropical countries and characterized by bright white spots, the hairs of which also become white. Vitiligo begins as small patches which slowly spread, often involving ultimately large areas of the body's surface. The disease is harmless, but most disfiguring in those of swarthy complexion. In the Septuagint 'zaraat' is translated by 'lepra.' There is absolutely nothing in the Greek description of lepra that suggests even in a remote manner the modern leprosy. The Greeks, in speaking of true leprosy, did not use the term 'lepra,' but 'elephantiasis.' It is evident, therefore, that they meant by 'lepra' an affection distinct and apart from the disease of leprosy as now known. The confusion and obscurity that have enveloped this subject for centuries have resulted from the use of different terms in successive ages to designate the same disease, and from the total change in the meaning and application of the word 'lepra.'—(J. F. Schamberg, M. D.)

"By almost all peoples and races leprosy has been regarded as a visitation of God on account of some sin, and the lepers have been kept apart from the rest of the people. The Jews were told that it came upon a man for idolatry, blasphemy, unchastity, theft, slander, false witness, false judgment, perjury, infringing the borders of a neighbor, devising malicious plans, or creating discord between brothers. Lepers were considered unclean (Lev. 13:44-46), had to rend their garments (excepting in the case of the women) cover their faces, go with unkempt hair, and cry, 'Unclean, unclean!' They had to live without the camp or city, had a special part of the synagogue reserved for them, and any thing they touched, or any house into

which they entered, was declared unclean." (G. T. Jackson, M. D.)

How Soon are Benefits Forgotten! (v. 7.) "This king of Israel, Jehoram, was the same one who at an earlier time had invoked Elisha's aid and had seen his prophetic power. Now he has forgotten

probably upon the minds of many in Israel as well, that the cure was effected by Jehovah, and by him without aid or human instrumentality. Elisha might have gotten much praise for himself out of it, but this he refused to do. He did not come from his house to greet Naa-



DAMASCUS IN SYRIA.

all about him. Himself with the two other kings had been eye-witnesses of what Elisha could do, yet now the calves of Dan and Bethel have so often taken up his heart that there is no room for the memory of Elisha. Whom he sues in his extremity, now his prosperity hath forgotten. Carnal hearts, when need drives them, can think of God and his prophets; when their turn is served, can as utterly forget them as if they were not." (Bishop Hall.)

Elisha's Great Purpose. (v. 10.) The prophet has one great serious purpose in his treatment of Naaman. It is to leave the impression indelibly stamped upon the mind of the nobleman, and

man, not because he was churlish, but because he wished to impress upon him that the sole condition of his cure was faith, and faith in whom? In Jehovah, the God of Israel. And this was where Naaman staggered and halted. He had come with an abundance of wealth, expecting to purchase healing, but his riches availed nothing. He had pictured to himself exactly how the prophet would proceed, for he had seen those who claimed magical power attempt such things before, but the prophet conformed to his expectations in no respect. He is commanded to do something which will show that he is putting his trust in Israel's God alone. To have bathed in

the pellucid waters of his own land would have relieved him somewhat, for it would not have been so apparent then that the prophet was exalting his own God. Naaman was willing for the prophet to call upon his God; he expected that, but Elisha puts the condition of cure so that there can be no escape for any intelligent mind from the conclusion that the cure was by Jehovah alone. He hesitates, but he is anxious for the cure, and so yields to the solicitation of his servants. When the cure has been effected, Naaman hesitates no longer, but gives the thanks to God.

The Lesson of Obedience. (v. 14.) "It was not the water either of Jordan or of Abanah which could heal, it was the obedience of this haughty general to a mandate which seemed to him frivolous and absurd. In the Gospels faith is the first requisite in similar cases of healing, and so it was here also—faith and obedience. Naaman came with his mind all made up as to how he was to be healed, and he turned away in anger and disgust from the course which the prophet prescribed. Yet, when he turned back, even with a lame and half-doubting faith, and a half-unwilling obedience, he was healed. This is the permanent truth which is involved in the story." (Summer.)

This was a lesson which Israel needed to be taught time and again. The sole condition of obtaining the blessings of God is obedience. This was taught to Saul (1 Sam. 15), and to Jeroboam (1 Kings 13), and it is now taught to Naaman, and through him to all Israel. It is still needed. Obedience under the Christian dispensation is not merely observance of formal rules, but consists in conforming our lives and our dispositions to the pattern set by Christ.

The Remainder of the Story. (vs. 15-27.) Naaman returned to Samaria to express his gratitude to the prophet and to confess his faith in the prophet's God. He

brought the money with him, expecting to give it as a present for his cure, and now he offers it to the prophet; but Elisha, true to his purpose of impressing upon Naaman that the cure was effected by Jehovah and by him alone, refuses all reward. He feels that to accept a present will take away somewhat from the awe and gratitude which the foreigner should feel toward the God who can achieve such mighty things. The impression which the cure and Elisha's bearing had made upon the Syrian nobleman was all that the prophet could desire. He declares that henceforth he will worship no other god. He is firmly convinced of the deity of Jehovah alone. His request to take with him some earth is not to be construed merely as a mingling of error with truth. Jehovah was the God of Israel; in that land alone he had manifested himself. For this reason he wishes to erect an altar of this earth, and not because he believes it has magical power. It will be on the heathen land a memorial of the true God and of his prophet. His request, too, that he be pardoned for bowing in the temple of the Syrian god is not an asking permission to worship both gods. In the discharge of his official duties he must bow in the temple of Rimmon, but he does not intend to worship. The word for *bow* does not necessarily mean a religious act. Naaman does not see that it is his duty to resign his office. Such a step for religious scruples was probably unprecedented. He feels that he is acting somewhat inconsistently, and he has a tender conscience, and he proposes a course which to him seems straightforward and open. The prophet seems to have the same feeling about it. His answer is not evasive. It is direct and to the point. He dismisses him in peace, which must mean that he approved of Naaman's course. From our Christian point of view we must disapprove of the stand taken both by Naaman and Elisha.

That tender conscience of the nobleman can not but be hardened by contact with false worship, even though he does not participate in it. Yet his stand is far higher than that taken by any other heathen of this time. Paul would have disapproved what Elisha here permitted, but the prophet does not think of himself as a missionary to the heathen. He was not striving to win other persons than Israelites to worship Jehovah. Naaman has offered to do more than could naturally be expected. Many in Israel who claimed to be worshipers of Jehovah

were doing worse than Naaman. Why should he not be dismissed in peace?

The story of Gehazi's greed furnishes a dark contrast to Naaman's noble actions. It serves the purpose of the foil to the jewel. He sees an opportunity to enrich himself and become the possessor of olive yards, vineyards, flocks, herds and a retinue of servants. He obtained more than he asked, and it probably seemed to him to be a lordly sum, as much as king Omri paid for Samaria, about \$3,600 in our money, but at what a serious loss to himself did he obtain it!

THE LESSON STORY.

The story of Elisha abounds in miracles. Although they are nearly all miracles of mercy, yet they are as varied as the life of the prophet, and each seems to reflect some phase of his inner life. In the raising of the Shunammite's son, Elisha shows his gratitude for kindness, sympathy in sorrow and power with God through prayer, and in the healing of Naaman is revealed the loyalty to truth, purity of motive and fearless dealing with sin which so strongly characterized the prophet of Samaria. Few stories of the Old Testament are possessed of more thrilling interest and practical value than the story of Naaman the leper. One so picturesque and striking hardly requires comment or explanation, as in the recital of the facts themselves one may catch its lessons.

The chief characters are two kings, a Jewish maiden, a prophet and a leper. The hero, Naaman, is described as a great general and "a mighty man of valor," yet over against his greatness as a soldier and his strong personality as a man, is recorded the sad fact that he was a leper. The foul disease of leprosy, though sometimes of slow progress, is none the less sure of its victim. So in spite of Naaman's active military service he was ever mindful of the fatal mal-

ady, which, sooner or later, would strike him down. Sad indeed had been his fate, but for the timely aid of a little Jewish maiden, who, taken captive from Samaria by the Syrians, was then serving as maid to the wife of Naaman. One day, while waiting on her mistress, she uttered the earnest longing of her heart that her master might visit the man of God in Samaria and be healed of his leprosy. Her saying was repeated to the king, who, eager to save his brave general, determines at once to send a letter, together with a splendid gift of gold, silver and fine raiment, to the king of Israel, requesting that his servant, Naaman, be healed of his leprosy.

On reaching Samaria the Syrian and his servants are met with suspicion by the king, who, strangely forgetful of the miracle-working prophet in his midst and seeing in the message only the pretext for a quarrel, in terror and despair rends his garments. But Elisha, with true prophetic vision, finds in it an occasion to glorify the God of Israel, and earnestly requests that Naaman be sent to him. The king is glad enough to be relieved of the responsibility, and the Syrian, with horses, chariots and servants, drives to the prophet's door. Very different is Elisha's reception from what Naaman

had expected, for instead of coming out to him, calling upon the name of his God, waving his hand over the leprous spots and magically healing them, he only sends his servant with the brief message, "Go, wash in the Jordan seven times, and be thou clean!"

To the proud Syrian, who had left the pure flowing waters of Abanah and Pharpar to seek for healing at the prophet's hands, nothing could have been more exasperating than this message to wash in the waters of the Jordan. Enraged, he would have returned to his own land, a hopeless leper, had not his faithful servants urged him to heed the prophet's word. At last, won by their reasoning, he starts upon his journey of twenty-five miles, descends the steep valley of the Jordan and bathes seven times in the river. At the seventh time—his obedient faith fully tested—he comes forth, with his flesh like that of a little child, healed completely. The inward change is likewise wonderful. His heart overflows with joy and gratitude, and like the alien whom Jesus healed he returns to give glory to God. He also urges upon Elisha the acceptance of a princely gift from himself, whom he humbly calls his "servant." But the prophet is too incorruptible to be tempted by earthly gain, and refuses it. Naaman is filled with reverence for even the land where such a God is worshiped and in which dwells such a prophet, and he begs to be allowed to take home with him enough of the sacred soil there to build an altar to the true God, who alone from henceforth shall receive his burnt offerings and sacrifices.

Yet in returning to Syria he must meet a perplexing problem. It shall be required of him, as formerly, to attend the king into the temple of the god Rimmon, the king leaning upon his arm, and with him to bow to the god. The prophet is asked if for this concession he may be pardoned, and Naaman is told to "go in

peace." In this enlightened age "bowing in the house of Rimmon" would mean dangerous compromise; but in that case it seems to have signified outward respect to the king and to the national worship when no evil could result from his example.

A deplorable sequel to the healing of Naaman is seen in the base conduct of Gehazi, Elisha's servant. Being present when Naaman's magnificent offer to his master was rejected, he determines that such a fortune shall not slip away, and makes haste to overtake the Syrian general. The latter, glancing back, sees the prophet's servant in pursuit, and dismounts to ask if all is well with Elisha. Gehazi, armed with deception, replies that his master is well, but that although he had at first declined the proffered gift, yet now, in an emergency, he has sent to request two changes of garments and one talent of silver. Naaman cheerfully complies; he even urges him to accept two talents, and Gehazi, with his treasures, servants and beasts of burden, turns back toward Samaria. On nearing the city his servants are dismissed in order that his new possessions may be the more securely hidden. At last, with hardened conscience, but affected innocence, he presents himself before his master, and is confronted with the question: "Whence comest thou, Gehazi?" Vain are all deceptions now. The prophet clearly reads the servant's guilt and tells the awful penalty of his sin—a sin made up of irreverence, selfishness and lies. The leprosy of Naaman is to cleave to him and to his children forever, and he goes out from his master's presence a leper as white as snow. The fate of Gehazi is a terrible warning against the sin of covetousness, a sin from which not even the prophet's servant, nor Judas, the disciple of our Lord, was free. It is a sin common in our day, and one from which men of all ages and conditions are in constant peril.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What two nations are mentioned in this lesson?
2. What persons are included?
3. Who were the two kings of the nations at this time?
4. In what direction did the countries lie with reference each to the other?
5. What were their capitals?
6. What rivers are mentioned in this lesson?
7. What is the Golden Text?
8. How long before the coming of Christ was this story?

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. What were Naaman's character and business? 2 Kings 5:1.
2. What three words are used to express his dignity? 2 Kings 5:1.
3. What was his great misfortune here named? 2 Kings 5:1.
4. What captive figures in the story, and how? 2 Kings 5:2.
5. What indicated the captive's faith and good-will? 2 Kings 5:3.
6. Name the further steps that led Naaman to the king of Israel? 2 Kings 5: 4-6
7. What offering did Naaman take with him, and why? 2 Kings 5:5.
8. What did the latter say and what was its effect upon the king of Israel? 2 Kings 5:6-7.
9. Who came to the king's relief, and how? 2 Kings 5:8.
10. Where did Naaman then go, and why? 2 Kings 5:9.
11. What message did Elisha send to Naaman? 2 Kings 5:10.
12. What had Naaman expected Elisha to do? 2 Kings 5:11.
13. What did Naaman say of the waters of Damascus? 2 Kings 5:12.
14. Who persuaded Naaman, and how, to obey the prophet? 2 Kings 5:13.
15. What was his obedience and what the result? 2 Kings 5:14.
16. What effect did the cure have upon Naaman's conviction and desire? 2 Kings 5:16, 17.
17. What two special favors did Naaman request? 2 Kings 5:17, 18.
18. What did Naaman offer for his cleansing? 2 Kings 5:15.
19. What evil thing did Gehazi secretly do? 2 Kings 5:20-24.
20. How was it discovered and what the result? 2 Kings 5:25-27.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. Naaman is especially referred to by our Lord at Nazareth. Luke 4:27.
2. The reason of this reference and its effect are also given there.
3. The great lesson of obedience to the Lord is emphasized by this story.
4. The importance of confession is illustrated by the captive maid.
5. The prophet dispensing the word suggests Christ revealing the Divine will.
6. The simplicity of the gospel—the power of God unto salvation—is illustrated by the simplicity of Elisha's message. No magic was required.
7. The cleansing was not due to the water nor to the obedience, but to the power and will of God. Likewise it is not the water in baptism that saves, nor the obedience, but the power or name of Christ in which it is performed. Paul thanked God that at Corinth he had baptized but few lest it be thought that he baptized in his own name. To have baptized in his own name would have vitiated and profaned the ordinance. It is

our privilege to obey, whether like Naaman we see not the reason, or like Jesus at his baptism we see the reason why.

8. Leprosy was a type of malignant sin. At the command and under the mighty power of Christ we may be cleansed and saved from sin through the obedience of faith.

9. Gehazi's sin of covetousness is presented in horrible contrast to the

consecrated trust and loyalty of Elisha. Achan, Ahab, Gehazi, Judas, Ananias and Sapphira are a half-dozen striking examples against the dreadful sin of covetousness. It is common. It is respectable. It is deceitful and deadly. "Beware of covetousness" (Luke 12:15). The New Testament is full of warnings against it in parables, sermons and epistles.

ELISHA'S HEAVENLY DEFENDERS.

2 Kings 6:8-23. (Print 2 Kings 6:8-17.)

GOLDEN TEXT—For he will give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. Psalm 91:11.

Memory Verses—15-17. **Suggested Reading**—2 Kings 6-7. **Time**—About 895 B. C. **Persons**—The King of Syria, Elisha, the King of Israel, servants of Ben-hadad, the servant of Elisha. **Place**—Dothan.

DAILY READINGS.

April 3.....M—2 Kings 6:8-23—Elisha's Heavenly Defenders.

April 4.....T—2 Kings 6:24—Elisha's Prophecy of Plenty.

April 5.....W—2 Kings 7:3-20—Elisha's Prophecy of Plenty Fulfilled.

April 6.... T—1 Sam. 11:1-13—Deliverance Through the Lord.

April 7.....F—2 Chron. 32:1-23—Hezekiah's Trust in the Lord.

April 8.... S—Dan. 1:1-27—Daniel's Trust in the Lord.

April 9.....S—Psa. 34:1-22—Deliverance by an Angel of the Lord.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Dothan is mentioned but one other time in the Scriptures. It was here that Joseph was seized by his brothers and sold to the Midianite merchantmen (Gen. 37:17). In the central part of Mount Ephraim there are a number of plains or valleys surrounded by hills. They may be thought of as a series, beginning with the one near the ancient Shiloh and increasing in size northward till it ends in the great plain of Esdraelon. The next to the last one towards the north, that is the one directly before the Plain of Esdraelon, is the Plain of Dothan. It is almost five miles across from east to west, though only about a mile and a half wide from north to south. On the northern side of this valley is the site of ancient Dothan. The name means *two wells*, and they are situated in the valley below. "The site of the town is a hill about 200 feet high, isolated on every side except the north, where a narrow saddle about 100 feet high connects it with a still higher hill in that direction. On the summit is a plateau of about forty acres, which has been artificially leveled. Toward the eastern side are some ruins of buildings that were

constructed of good limestone, while the remainder of the surface is dotted with heaps of small stones from cheaper houses. All the exposed soil is cultivated in grain. The slope of the hill on every side except the north is too steep for ascent on horseback. To the south about a mile, and to the west about five miles, there stretches a rich and beautiful valley, all cultivated in grain, and bordered by hills of moderate height. The word Dothan means *two wells*, and there they are in the valley south of the village, one a little to the right and the other to the left. When seen by the author flocks of goats and sheep were being watered at the more eastern, and at the other, about 100 yards to the west, a horsepower water-wheel was in motion, throwing water into a plastered reservoir about thirty feet square and three and a half feet deep, in which men were washing a flock of sheep preparatory to shearing them. From the reservoir water ran in an irrigating channel to support a fine garden of cucumbers, onions, and other vegetables below. The principal thoroughfares from the north in the direction of the Plain of Sharon,

8 Now the king of Syria was warring against Israel; and he took counsel with

his servants, saying, In such and such a place shall be my camp. 9 And the

the very road which the Ishmaelite caravan to which Joseph was sold was traveling, passes along the western foot of the hill, and Captain Wilson found in the plain a number of jug-shaped cisterns answering to the pit in which Joseph was placed. Everything corresponds

precisely to the scene of Joseph's sale, and not less so to that of the attempted arrest of Elijah. The mountain that was full of horses and chariots of fire to the opened eyes of Elisha's servant stands around on every side, and is not far away except to the west." (McGarvey.)

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

In the lesson for the present week we have another incident in the life of Elisha. In the text of Kings there stands but one incident between it and the lesson of last week. It is of interest, for it throws light upon Elisha's relation to the prophetic communities of his times. He was friendly to them and they looked up to him as a leader and a patron. They evidently lived together in some sort of community life, but their quarters, probably due to an increase in their numbers, had become too small. They talked of the situation with Elisha, and proposed to him enlargement, and invited him to accompany them on the trip to secure the necessary timber. To all of these proposals Elisha gave assent, though it is not certain that he took any part in the labor. One of the prophets lost the head of his ax by its flying from the handle and falling into the river. Elisha, however, made it float, and the man regained his ax. The incident is told for the sake

of the miracle. Immediately after this the lesson for the week is found. For some reason not told Elisha was then at Dothan, though from our last lesson it was learned that his home was in Samaria. No information is obtainable as to the time of this lesson. It could be either earlier or later than the healing of Naaman, for while Israel and Syria were then at peace, they are now engaged in a sort of guerilla warfare. It is more probable, however, that it was at least two or three years later, for while such a warfare had been carried on before (5:2), in this case it seemed to have merged into a more general war and a siege of Jehoram's capital. Through its assignment to this time is somewhat arbitrary it is placed two years after the healing of Naaman. Another slight indication that it was later than the cure of Naaman is the fact that Elisha seems to have secured another servant, which he would naturally do after Gehazi had contracted the leprosy.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 8. King of Syria: Ben-hadad (v. 24), almost certainly the one who carried on war with Ahab. **Took counsel with his servants:** They planned their raids and assigned certain places for their nightly camp in order that those who provided supplies, brought tidings or foraged, might know where to assem-

ble. This is a more general warfare than that mentioned in 5:2, though it is still carried on by raiding bands (v. 23).

9. The man of God: Elisha. **Unto the king of Israel:** Jehoram. Although Elisha had poor opinion of him (2 Kings 3:13, 14) he gave him aid against Syria for the nation's sake. He still has some

man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware that thou pass not such a place for thither the Syrians are coming down. 10 And the king of Israel sent to the place which the man of God told him and warned him of; and he saved himself there, not once nor twice. 11 And the heart of the king of Syria was sore troubled for this thing; and he called his servants, and said unto them, Will ye not show me which of us is for the king of Israel? 12 And one of his servants said, Nay, my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet that is

in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber. 13 And he said, Go and see where he is, that I may send and fetch him. And it was told him, saying, Behold, he is in Dothan.

14 Therefore sent he thither horses, and chariots, and a great host: and they came by night, and compassed the city about. 15 And when the servant of the man of God was risen early, and gone forth, behold, a host with horses and chariots was round about the city. And his servant said unto him, Alas, my mas-

hope of it. The Syrians are coming down: They came secretly and formed ambushes at such places to entrap Israel.

10. Sent to the place: This may mean that he sent a messenger to learn whether the prophet gave correct information or that he sent troops to the spot and thus frustrated the plan of Ben-hadad. The latter is more probable. Not once nor twice: This means a number of times.

11. Sore troubled: Distressed because he very naturally felt that there must be a traitor in his court since the king of Israel was manifestly informed of his plans.

12. One of his servants: The old expositors supposed that this was Naaman. This is possible, but since the name is not given, it is more likely that it was some one else. There was frequent traveling and continuous communication between the two countries, and in this way the fame of Elisha spread throughout Syria, as well as Israel. There is nothing in the story of Naaman which would suggest that Elisha gave information to the king of Israel, but the attitude of the king and the prophet towards one another seems to suggest the very oppo-

site (5:7,8). In thy bedchamber: The bedchamber of an eastern king is in his harem, into which none but a chosen few, and these the most trustworthy, may enter. This phrase meant even more to an oriental than to a westerner.

13. I may send and fetch him: We are not warranted in assuming any other design on the part of the king of Syria than to deprive Jehoram of the benefit of Elisha's counsel. It is not certain that he expected to make use of Elisha, nor that he planned to kill him. Dothan: (See Geographical Notes.)

14. A great host: Here and in verse 15 the "host" refers to the infantry. It was large to be sent for one man, though it was not a great army, since Elisha could lead it into the streets of Samaria, and the king was able to feed them there (vs. 20-23).

15. Servants: This was not Gehazi, since he is always called by name. The margin has "minister" to indicate that the Hebrew word means a personal attendant. He was not a servant in the same sense that Naaman and others were servants of the king of Syria, but more of a menial. The same word is used in 4:22, How shall we do? How shall we conduct ourselves? or what shall we do to escape in safety?

ter! how shall we do? 16 And he answered, Fear not; for they that are with us are more than they that are with them. 17 And Elisha prayed, and said, Jehovah, I pray thee, open his eyes, that

(American Standard Revised Version. Co

he may see. And Jehovah opened the eyes of the young man; and he saw: and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha.

pyright, 1901, by Thomas Nelson & Sons.)

16. This verse expresses faith in God's protecting power. The prophet declares this doctrine in terms of soldiers and chariots. This would serve to reassure the servant more than a statement of the abstract doctrine that God takes care of his own.

17. That which the prophet declared in v. 16 is now exhibited to the servant in concrete form, and its manifestation to him is likewise in terms of armed men and chariots. **Open his eyes:** That is, grant the servant an inner vision that he may see things which are hidden from

the natural eye. **The mountain:** On which Dothan stood. The servant saw the horses and chariots arranged in an inner circle between him and the Syrian host (cf. Ps. 34:7). "The angel of the Lord encampeth about them that fear him and delivereth them." **Horses and chariots of fire:** It is not necessary to understand literal horses and chariots. They appeared to the servant in a vision and denoted God's protecting power. It was a great and comforting truth expressed in terms which would appeal to the eye and comfort the heart.

COMMENTS.

The Remainder of the Incident. (vs. 18-23.) After reassurance had been given to the servant, he and the prophet seem to have descended from the city, and on the plain below he met the Syrian band. Elisha prayed that they might be stricken with blindness, and they did become the victims of an illusion under the spell of which they followed Elisha into the very midst of Samaria. Elisha told them, "This is not the way, neither is this the city," and under the hallucination in which they were cast, they followed him without misgiving. This falsehood of the prophet has caused the commentators great pains. Lange, following Thénis, disposes of it in this way: "There is no untruth in the words of Elisha; for his home is not in Dothan, where he was only residing temporarily, but in Samaria, and the words 'to the man' may well mean to his house." Josephus, by the same explanation, defends the prophet from untruthfulness; Rawlinson meets the difficulty by contend-

ing that untruth is justifiable towards a public enemy; "Where we have a right to kill, much more have we a right to deceive by stratagem." It must be admitted that at least Elisha used a form of speech which the Syrians understood otherwise than he intended it, even if he did not pretend to be anything else than what he was. By this the Syrians were entrapped. They had intended to capture him, but instead he captured them. Probably Elisha would have been greatly astonished if some moralist had told him that he was doing wrong. When the scribes and Pharisees planned to trap Jesus in the case of the woman taken in adultery, but instead he shamed them, was the principle in any degree different? Even if Elisha had held them captives of war he could not have been blameworthy. He tells the king that to slay them would be dishonorable, but it was even then counted dishonorable to slay captives taken in war. But Elisha did not harm them in any way. After

he had demonstrated to them that they could not capture him he takes them under his protection, repays them good for evil and dismisses them to their home in safety. The effect was salutary. While it did not bring about peace between Israel and Syria, it did put an end to the marauding bands which filled the country with alarm and ruin.

Why did not Elisha Escape Before? Since Elisha knew of the movements of the Syrian army, and was able to warn the king of Israel of an intended attack, why did he not flee from Dothan before it was invested? Two possible ways of looking at this matter at once suggest themselves. First he may have known all about it, but he chose to remain, for he knew well that no harm could befall him. Those who were for him were more than those who were opposed. On the other hand, this attack of the Syrians may not have been known to him. Signs, says the apostle, are for those who believe not. Miraculous power was never given for the protection of the one who possessed the power. Jesus did not use his power for his own protection, and where the safety of the prophet alone is concerned, the divine knowledge may not have been given to him. His own faith that Jehovah could protect was sufficient to guard him against needless alarm. It is not in accord with the biblical representation of miraculous power to suppose that since he had knowledge or power in one instance he must have the same in all others. Between these two ways of regarding this, the reader has choice. The former corresponds with the serene, trustful behavior of the prophet when he sees the city surrounded, and the latter is quite in harmony with the usual biblical representation of the miraculous.

God Protects His Servants. (vs. 16, 7.) The first practical lesson which may be deduced from this narrative is that God protects his own. This involves what is the fundamental idea of theism, namely, that God is in this world, and is active in guiding its affairs. This is the

commonplace of the true religion. "In God we live and move and have our being." "Except the Lord build the house, they labor in vain who build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." But this lesson is an advance upon this truth. It teaches further that in guiding the affairs of this world God extends special protection to his servants. This Israel had ever been taught to believe. They were taught not to fear the Egyptian host by having it declared to them, "Jehovah will fight for you" (Ex. 14:15). By this truth Hezekiah encouraged Judah against Sennacherib (2 Chron. 32:7,8), and the Psalmist gives varied and vigorous utterance to it (Ps. 34:7; 55:18; 91:11). Finally the Christian apostle exclaims: "If God is for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31). The servant of the prophet was alarmed at the sight of the hostile army, and Elisha wished to give him courage by having him taught this great truth which underlies the true faith, "The eyes of the Lord are upon them that fear him."

The Eye of Faith Sees this Protection. The second practical lesson which is taught by the vision granted to the servant is that to the eye of faith this divine protection is visible. From the first glimpse of the Syrian host Elisha trusted in the might of Jehovah. When the servant uttered a word of fear Elisha prayed that his eyes might be opened to see the invisible hosts of heaven marshaled for his protection. To those who have possessed faith, deliverance seemed always ready unless they saw that their death could advance the cause of God. When some brought to Jesus the tidings that Herod sought his life he made reply in words which mean that no power could harm him till his work was completed. To Pilate he said: "Thou wouldst have no power against me, except it were given thee from above" (John 19:11). Luther had this confidence and went his way amid many perils unafraid.

The Vision. (v.17.) It is not neces-

sary to think that the horses and chariots which the servant saw were literal horses and chariots, even of fire. It is not to be thought that Elisha moved through life continually conscious of heavenly troops guarding him. The servant had a childlike mind, and a proof was needed which would appeal to his mind. So the doctrine was represented to him in a concrete form and by means of such figures as would convey to him the idea of divine protection. This purpose the vision of men and chariots served exactly. No word of explanation was needed to make him understand the significance of the vision. It is not meant

that the vision was unreal, nor is this explanation an attempt to rationalize the miraculous feature, but that we are not to suppose that God sends soldiers from heaven whenever one of his saints needs protection. When the Psalmist says that the angel of Jehovah encampeth round about them that fear him (34:7) it is not to be taken literally that angels from God's host pitch camp about each of his saints. This was a concrete and pictorial way of representing to a doubting servant of God the same truth which was expressed by the apostle when he said, "If the Lord be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

THE LESSON STORY.

We come now to the last of the series of lessons on Elisha. His life, so full of kindly deeds among the people, reminds us of Him who "went about doing good." And not only in the private walks of life, but also through distinguished public service, Elisha proved himself a true patriot. At this time Samaria was being greatly annoyed by the incessant invasions of the king of Syria. In these troublous days the prophet would often warn the king of Israel of his danger in time to escape or fortify himself to meet it. Ben-hadad, finding his plans thus thwarted, searches for the cause and decides that there must be treachery among his servants. Calling them together, he angrily demands to know who is the traitor. They assure him of their faithfulness, and remind him of the prophet in Samaria, who not only works mighty miracles, but can also tell the secrets whispered by their king in his bed-chamber. On hearing this, the king determines to take immediate steps toward the surprise and capture of Elisha, and sends to find out where he is. Being told that he is at Dothan, about twelve miles north of Samaria, he sends by night a great company with horses and chariots to surround the city and prevent his escape. Early the next morning

Elisha's servant is terrified at sight of the Syrian soldiers compassing the city, and cries in despair: "Alas! my master, what shall we do?" In happy contrast is the prophet's calm reply: "Fear not: they that be with us are more than they that be with them." Elisha then prays that this servant also may be granted spiritual vision, and immediately his eyes being opened, the young man sees the mountains full of chariots and horses round about the prophet. This story of Elisha has been beautifully called "a picture commentary on the Psalmist's words, The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him and delivereth them." Yet we must not suppose by the vision granted to Elisha and his servant that God's faithful ones are always to be thus miraculously delivered from their enemies, but rather that in the midst of their enemies they are to be divinely strengthened and sustained. Saints and martyrs through all ages have had this sense of God's nearness and protection, when to the world they have seemed almost helpless and forsaken. The horses and chariots of fire around about this faithful servant, should mean that no evil can befall the child of God while in the path of duty. "He shall not be afraid of the terror by

night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day; of the pestilence that walketh in darkness, nor for the destruction that wasteth at noonday, for though a thousand shall fall at his side and ten thousand at his right hand," yet it shall be well with him who "dwelleth in the secret place of the Most High and under the shadow of the Almighty."

Elisha, assured of God's protection, descends the hill and advances into the midst of the Syrians. He prays that dimness and confusion of sight may be sent upon them, and this he does in order that they finally may see clearly. In their bewilderment, he tells them that they are in the wrong way, and offers to guide them aright. Thus directed,

they are led into Samaria, and suddenly find themselves at the mercy of the king and his soldiers. Jehoram, eager for vengeance, yet in deference to the prophet, asks, "My father, shall I smite? Shall I smite?" The gentle spirit of Elisha is manifest in his reply. Reproachfully the king is asked if he should smite helpless captives with the sword and bow, then bidden, not only to spare them, but also to supply abundant food for their hunger before sending them away. After such tokens of the prophet's power, and such magnanimous treatment on the part of their enemies, we can not wonder at the record that the "Syrians came no more into the land of Israel."

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. At what did Naaman at first take offense?
2. What led him to consider favorably the prophet's command?
3. May we suppose the healing virtue was in the Jordan or in Jehovah?
4. What indicated that Naaman ascribed his cleansing to the Lord?
5. Did Naaman seem to attribute any merit to his own obedience?

6. What similarity do you perceive between this act and that of baptism?

7. What is the most essential principle in baptism? See 1 Cor. 1:15; Acts 10:48 and Acts 19:5. Answer—That it be performed in the name of Christ.

8. Can anything not authorized of Christ be done in his name?

9. The name of the Lord signifies the character, will, spirit and authority of the Lord.

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSONS WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. Was there peace or warfare at this time between Syria and Israel? 2 Kings 6:8.
2. What true patriot in Israel at this time disconcerted the military plans of the king of Syria? 2 Kings 6:9.
3. What value did the king of Israel seem to place upon Elisha's counsel? 2 Kings 6:10.
4. To what investigation on the part of Ben-hadad did Elisha's conduct lead? 2 Kings 6:11-12.
5. What then did king Ben-hadad determine against the prophet? 2 Kings 6:13.
6. Describe the early morning vision

of the servant of Elisha. 2 Kings 6:15.

7. What did he say and what was Elisha's reply? 2 Kings 6:15-16.

8. What two things did Elisha say to his servant and what three prayers did he offer? 2 Kings 6:16-18-20.

9. To what city were the soldiers of Syria led? 2 Kings 6:19.

10. What question did the king of Israel ask of Elisha? 2 Kings 6:21.

11. What was Elisha's answer and his reason given? 2 Kings 6:22.

12. What happy result followed this considerate treatment? 2 Kings 6:23.

13. From this lesson estimate the value of Elisha to Israel.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. The prophet who stood for God was a type of Christ the great Prophet.

2. On what occasion did Jesus say he could call twelve legions of angels to his assistance and why did he refuse to call them? Matt. 26:53-54.

3. What may be regarded as the most essential condition of prayer? 1 John 5:14; John 14:13.

4. What is the point of special application in the Golden Text?

5. What is said about our looking not at the things which are seen but at the things that are unseen? 2 Cor. 4:17-18.

6. What wonderful text assures us that God works for them that love him? Rom. 8:28.

7. What is the value of spiritual vision in the spiritual life?

8. How can our vision of spiritual realities be improved? Rev. 3:18.

9. What is said concerning the ministry of angels? Heb. 1:14.

10. When Jesus was in deep trouble because of his enemies wherein did he find comfort and support? Luke 22:43.

11. Wherein did Paul say he found strength? 2 12:9.

Lesson III.

April 16.

JOASH, THE BOY KING, CROWNED IN JUDAH.

2 Kings 11:1-20. (Print 11:9-20.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. Ps. 119:2.

Memory Verse—12. **Suggested Reading**—Chapters 8-11. **Time**—887 B. C. **Persons**—Athaliah, Jehoiada, Joash, Mattan, the captains, the guard, and all the people. **Place**—The Temple.

DAILY READINGS.

April 10....M—2 Kings 11:1-20; 2 Chron. 22:10—23:15—Joash, the Boy King, Crowned in Judah.

April 11... T—2 Kings 8:7-15—Elisha's Prophecy of Death of Ben-hadad.

April 12....W—2 Kings 8:16-19; 2 Chron. 21:1—22:9—The Rule in Judah of the House of Ahab.

April 13... T—2 Kings 9:17-21—The Anointing of Jehu.

April 14... F—2 Kings 9:17-28—Remembering the Blood of Naboth.

April 15... S—2 Kings 9:30-27—Word Fulfilled Concerning Jezebel.

April 16.... S—2 Kings 10:1-36—The Sweeping Reforms of Jehu.

TOPOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

The Temple. A plan of the temple and palace grounds is almost necessary to understand all of the details of the movements of troops described in this lesson. But it is impossible to draw such a plan because the Scripture information is too meager. One or two things, however, are evident. The palace was on lower ground than the temple. This is made clear by verse 19 and by Jer. 26:10. The palace seems to have been hard by the temple, only a wall separating the two (Ez. 43:6-9). Josephus

and some later authorities erroneously place it at a greater distance from the temple. Two gates admitted passage from the grounds of one to the grounds of the other. One of these is called the gate Sur, in Kings, and the gate of Foundation, in Chronicles (2 Chron. 23:5). The other is called the gate behind the guard (v. 6), or the gate of the guard (v. 19). Athaliah made her escape by the horses' entry to the king's house (v. 16). Probably this is identical with one of the gates mentioned above.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

The last king of Judah whose life and reign were studied was Jehoshaphat. Between his time and that of Joash, the kingdom of Judah sank into the valley of humiliation, and our lesson to-day tells how it emerged from the shadow. Previous account has been taken of the marriage of Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram, to the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel. Such a union could not fail to bring unhappy days to Judah. It is somewhat singular that while Israel, under the leadership of

Elisha, revived the worship of Jehovah, its southern sister wandered farther from his faith. On the death of Jehoshaphat his son Jehoram, the son-in-law of Ahab, came to the throne in Jerusalem. He served the gods of his wife's choice (2 Kings 8:18) and slaughtered all his brothers, together with many other princes (2 Chron. 21:4). But these strange gods and savage ways did not aid him, for Edom and Libnah revolted (2 Kings 8:20-22); the Philistines and the Arabians

invaded his land and took from him his treasure, his wives and all of his sons save one (2 Chron. 21:16, 17), and he, after a reign of eight years, succumbed to an incurable disease (2 Chron. 21:18-19). He was succeeded by his son Ahaziah. The sacred historian blasts any hope of good in him by the statement that his mother was Athaliah, the daughter of Omri (Ahab). Soon after his accession to the throne he went to Jezreel on a visit to Jehoram, the king of Israel, and while there was slain, together with his uncle, by the hand of Jehu. The capture by the Philistines of many members of the royal family (2 Chron. 21:17), followed by the slaughter of forty-two by Jehu, had thinned the ranks of David's line; but it suffered still more at the hands of Athaliah on the death of her husband and the ascension to the throne of her own son Ahaziah. She became the queen mother, the first woman of the land. When her son died, however, she lost all right to the power, and she could not tolerate the thought of retiring into obscurity and inaction. She seized the power herself and slew all (as she thought) of the seed^{14, 18, 20}.

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

Athaliah was mistaken in her supposition that she had slain all males of David's line. One only, and he but an infant, was saved. This was accomplished through the instrumentality of a woman named Jehosheba (called Jehoshebeath in Chronicles). The fact that she was a daughter of Jehoram by another wife than Athaliah explains her interest; and the fact that she was the wife of the high priest (2 Chron. 22:11) gave to her the opportunity. About the temple, as erected by Solomon, there were chambers on two sides and one end. In one of these chambers used ordinarily for the storing of mattresses and bedding the child was hidden, and there was kept for six years. In his seventh year the high priest Jehoiada planned a revolt against the authority of Athaliah. He was confident of sym-

royal. For six years Athaliah held undisputed possession of the throne, the only woman who ever reigned in Jerusalem till the ascension of the widow of Alexander Jannæus in the first century before Christ. It is justly a matter of surprise that she was able to reign for so long a period in seemingly perfect security. Why did not Judah arise and hurl her from the throne? Geo. Adam Smith, in answer to this question, finds three reasons why she was strong: (1) As she was virtually a Phœnician princess she was supported by foreign troops. Probably the Carians who aided in expelling her had given help in her usurpation. (2) Her name, which means "time of Jehovah," suggests that she had some relation to the worship of Jehovah and the presence of the priest in the temple indicates that she did not molest this worship. (3) She probably had a strong native party on her side. This party belonged to the city, which would be favorably inclined to her since she enriched it by commerce. It should be noted that it was *the people of the land* which supported Jehoiada (vs.

pathy and the aid of the captains of the guard which stood on duty about the temple and the palace. These troops were composed of two parts, Carites, probably Carians—that is, foreign mercenary troops—and runners,—foot soldiers (see margin). The leaders of the temple guard were bound by a solemn oath, and then to them he showed the young prince. Chronicles (2 Chron 23:1) gives the number of these captains as five, and names them. The day chosen on which the priest was to unmask his plot was the Sabbath, probably because the people would be present on that day in large numbers; and the time was the hour when the guard was changed. This enabled him to make use of both the ingoing and the outgoing portions. Supported in this way, Jehoiada prepared his surprise. He

9 And the captains over hundreds did according to all that Jehoiada the priest commanded; and they took every man his men, those that were to come in on the sabbath, with those that were to go out on the sabbath, and came to Jehoiada the priest. 10 And the priest delivered to the captains over hundreds the spears and shields that had been king David's, which were in the house of Jehovah. 11 And the guard stood, every man with

his weapons in his hand, from the right side of the house to the left side of the house, along by the altar and the house, by the king round about. 12 Then he brought out the king's son, and put the crown upon him, and gave him the testimony; and they made him king, and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said, *Long live the king.*

13 And when Athaliah heard the noise of the guard and of the people, she came

placed the guards at their assigned stations. The main features are clear, through the exact details are difficult, if not impossible, to follow. One-third kept watch over the palace, two companies were at the gate which led from the tem-

ple court towards the palace, and two companies guarded the temple itself. An especial caution was given to guard the person of the young king and slay any man who might venture within the ranks of the guard.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 9. Captains over hundreds: There were five of these. Their names are given in 2 Chron. 23:1. **All things that Jehoiada...commanded:** The commands of the priest are found in vs. 5-8. **Those that were to come in . . . to go out:** All of this took place at the hour of the Sabbath when the guard was changed. One part was leaving and the other coming on to guard duty. The Chronicler says expressly that Jehoiada "dismissed not the courses" (23:8).

10. Spears and shields that had been king David's: Probably these were the weapons which David captured and preserved. David captured some shields from the servants of Hadadezer (2 Sam. 8:7). No doubt it was felt that a blessing would result from the use of these weapons in the interest of David's house. **Which were in the house of Jehovah:** It was customary among all ancient peoples to preserve captured weapons and banners in the temples as trophies (1 Sam. 21:9).

11. The guard: These are the runners mentioned in verse 4. **From the right side, etc.:** The altar stood directly in

front of the temple. The guards were arranged in lines from either corner of the temple porch to the altar, thus forming a triangle, with the porch as the base and with the altar as the apex. The young king came out of the temple through the porch between the two lines of guards. Thus they were round about the king.

12. Gave him: The Hebrew does not contain these words, but our translators were probably correct in supplying them, otherwise it would mean that the testimony was placed on his head, a custom which is never mentioned. The law specified that the king was to have in his possession a copy of the Law (Deut. 17:18, 19). **The testimony:** The Law, as is evident from Ex. 25:16 and 31:18. **Long live the king:** Literally. "Let the king live," the words by which it was customary to greet a new king (1 Sam. 10:24; Sam. 16:16; 1 Kings 1:25, 39).

13. And of: These words are not in the Hebrew, but they seem to be necessary to make good sense. **She came:** It seems singular that no guard is mentioned. Josephus says she had a guard,

to the people into the house of Jehovah: 14 and she looked, and, behold, the king stood by the pillar, as the manner was, and the captains and the trumpets by the king; and all the people of the land rejoiced, and blew trumpets. Then Athaliah rent her clothes, and cried, Treason! 15 And Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains of hundreds that were set over the host, and said unto them, Have her forth between the ranks; and him that followeth her slay with the sword. For the priest said, Let her not be slain in the house of Jeho-

vah. 16 So they made way for her; and she went by the way of the horses' entry to the king's house: and there was she slain.

17 And Jehoiada made a covenant between Jehovah and the king and the people, that they should be Jehovah's people; between the king also and the people. 18 And all the people of the land went to the house of Baal, and brake it down; his altars and his images brake they in pieces thoroughly, and slew Mattan the priest of Baal before the altars. And the priest appointed officers over the

but it was not allowed to enter the gate, though she was. While the text gives no authority for this, it is not unreasonable.

The people: In the following verse and many other times they are called "the people of the land." We are probably to understand from this that they were the country people, who were favorable to David's house.

14. **The king stood by the pillar:** Elsewhere there is mention of a pillar or platform on which the king stood on public occasions (2 Kings 23:3; 2 Chron. 34:31). In the parallel passage in 2 Chronicles it is called "his pillar" (23:13). **As the manner was:** Here was where the king was accustomed to stand at his coronation and on state occasions. Athaliah therefore did not need any one to tell her what this meant. **Trumpets:** This clearly means *trumpeters*. These were either priests or Levites (2 Kings 12:13, 2 Chron. 7:6, 13:14). **Rent her clothes:** To denote her horror and her feeling that all was lost. **Treason:** The Hebrew word means conspiracy.

15. **Have her forth between the ranks:** This was to prevent escape and to prevent the people from slaying her there and thus polluting the temple. **Him that followeth her:** Any friend or attendant.

16. **The way of the horses' entry:** The first indication that horses were kept in

Jerusalem. This was one of the gates from the temple to the palace.

17. **A covenant:** The original has "this covenant"—that is, the usual and well-known declaration was required of the king that he would serve Jehovah and rule according to his law. **Between the king also and the people:** There were two covenants or agreements entered into. The first was between Jehovah on one side and the king and people on the other. It was a covenant to serve Jehovah. The other covenant was between the people and the king. Each party covenanted to be loyal subjects and faithful king, respectively.

18. **The house of Baal:** A temple of Baal was erected somewhere in Jerusalem, according to 2 Chron. 24:7: It was partly furnished with articles taken from the temple of Jehovah. **Mattan the priest of Baal:** From the fact that only one priest of Baal is mentioned it may be inferred that he was not extensively worshipped in Judah. Compare the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal in Israel (1 Kings 18:19). **Officers over the house of Jehovah:** The worship of Jehovah had been neglected, and in restoring it there was the necessity of appointing priests and Levites for the various duties. In Chronicles (23:18-19) fuller details are given.

house of Jehovah. 19 And he took the captains over hundreds, and the Carites, and the guard, and all the people of the land; and they brought down the king from the house of Jehovah, and came by the way of the gate of the guard unto

the king's house. And he sat on the throne of the kings. 20 So all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet. And Athaliah they had slain, with the sword at the king's house.

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19. Four classes took part in conducting the king to the palace. They were (1) captains, the five officers or centurions; (2) Carites, probably Carians, foreign mercenary troops; (3) the guard, the runners, the foot soldiers; (4) all the people of the land, the populace, more generally from the country. **Brought down the king:** This shows that the temple was on higher ground than the palace. Some authorities place the palace on the same hill as the temple, and some on the western hills across the Tyropeon valley. The former view is pre-

ferred. (See Topographical Notes.) **Gate of the guard:** This is probably the same as the gate behind the guard (v. 6).

20. Two classes are mentioned: (1) **The people of the land:** These rejoiced because David's line and the worship of Jehovah was popular with them. (2) **The city:** If any faction had caused disorder it would have been the city dwellers, for they profited by Athaliah's policy. In later times a foreign faction could always be found in Jerusalem. **With the sword:** Here the mode of Athaliah's death is stated.

COMMENTS.

The Religious Situation in Judah. It is possible to make out with a fair degree of certainty the religious situation in Judah during the six years that Athaliah ruled. That she was a worshiper of Baal will be accepted without specific evidence, for what other religion would one expect the daughter of Jezebel to adhere to? A temple of Baal was erected somewhere in Jerusalem. In this temple Mattan, the priest of Baal, served. The temple of Jehovah was spoiled to furnish the house of Baal. It seems never to have been desecrated by idolatrous rites, and the worship of Jehovah was maintained but suffered from comparative neglect. The ease with which the young prince was kept concealed in one of its chambers for six years is proof that the temple was not frequented by many. Yet, thoroughly as Athaliah dominated the politics of the country, the religious reaction was not as thorough as the similar movement headed by Jezebel in Israel. The

Athalian party was to be found in the city, but the rank and file of the country folk remained true to Jehovah, and welcomed the first opportunity to revolt against the foreign woman and the foreign faith. Judah could boast of more than seven thousand who had not bowed to Baal nor kissed his idol. In this period of decay and moral degradation Judah did not sink as low as her sister, and she never did. It was for this reason that, while Israel perished and lost her part in the establishment of the true religion, Judah persevered, and it was possible to say of her, as at a later time, "Salvation is of the Jews."

The Significance of Joash's Accession. "The elevation of Joash to the throne of Judah has great importance in the history of redemption, inasmuch as God's guidance and protection of the house of David appears in it, and as it is a confirmation of the promise given to this house that it should never be extinguished, and

that its light should never fail (2 Sam. 5:13; 1 Kings 11:36; 25:4; 2 Kings 3:19; cf. Ps. 132:17). In the kingdom of Israel the dynasties changed; one overthrew the other and destroyed it; with Jehu the fourth had already begun. In the kingdom of Judah, on the contrary, the house of David had maintained itself until this time. But now, when Jehu had killed Ahaziah and forty-two of his rel-

this event, there was in it at the same time, for every faithful servant of Jehovah, a pledge that the God of Israel would protect this house also for the future in any calamities; and so he did, until finally, according to the promise, the great "Son of David" came, who was not only the "lamp" of David, but the light of the world, whose kingdom shall have no end (Luke 1:32, 33, 69). (Lange.)



THE CROWNING OF JOASH.

atives, and all the remaining royal seed had been destroyed by Athaliah, it appeared that the line of David also was at an end. But God wonderfully ordered it so that an infant of this house escaped the massacre and was saved. He remained concealed for years, and it must have been believed that David's lamp had gone out forever, when suddenly the sole remaining offshoot of the house of David ascended the throne, and the murderess Athaliah, the last survivor of the house of Ahab, perished. As the fulfillment of the promise to protect the house of David must have been recognized in

The Character of Athaliah. This woman was a true daughter of her mother. Like her, she was fanatical, idolatrous, imperious and cruel. As Jezebel had been the evil genius of Ahab, so did she control for evil her husband and her son. It was this imperious character of Athaliah which fastened all of the evils of Ahab and Jezebel upon Judah. Scarcely could Jehoshaphat have anticipated the coming evils when for the sake of political advantage he entered into an alliance with Ahab and sealed the treaty by the marriage of his son with Ahab's daughter. It was customary for aspirants to

the throne to put to death their opponents, but Athaliah did worse than this. She shed blood of her own family. This is called by Ewald a senseless crime. It was not that she wished to attach Judah to Israel, for Jehu was reigning there, but because she was passionately fond of power. The Chronicler calls her that "wicked woman." When she saw her subjects about to restore to the throne its lawful ruler she cried out "Treason!" so firmly had she come to believe in the legitimacy of her own claim to it. There was no one, however, who came to her rescue, and with her death the polluting influence of Jezebel on Israel and Judah comes to an end forever.

The Character of Jehoiada. The high priest was a remarkable man. He was remarkable in the first place in that he maintained his character pure in the midst of such corrupting influences. By marriage he was connected with the court, yet he was unstained by its vices.

THE LESSON STORY.

Joash, the boy king, came to the throne of Judah at the early age of seven. The most thrilling events gather about his infancy and childhood. Like Moses and the babe in Bethlehem he was marvelously protected at a time of immense peril. When Azariah, the father of Joash, died, the ambitious queen regent, Athaliah, in a frantic effort to usurp the throne, ordered that all the seed royal be put to death, and supposed that her command had been fully obeyed; but through the efforts of Jehosheba, his aunt, Joash was taken from among the king's sons and, with his nurse, hidden away in one of the lumber rooms of the temple. For six years he remained in this place of safety, and during that time Athaliah's rule over Judah was as despotic as had been that of her mother, Jezebel, in Israel. Baal worship was boldly set up, a temple to the heathen god being erected in Jerusalem, not far from the temple of Jehovah; and though not aggressive in

Then he was a prudent man. He had in his possession the heir of the throne, the only remaining descendant of David; and for six years he kept the secret and guarded him securely. This is shown furthermore by the skill with which he made and carried out his plans for the crowning of Joash. He chose a time which was best suited to his purpose; he made no mistake in taking the captains and others into his confidence; and it seems that he awakened no jealousy. There was no tumult nor violence in carrying out his plan, and it failed in no respect. It was not done from selfishness nor love of power, but his motive was love for Jehovah. After the king is on the throne his first care is to renew the covenant between the king and the people, binding the one to fidelity to the law and the other to fidelity to the king. Scarcely has any man ever carried through so difficult and dangerous an enterprise with such entire credit to himself.

her persecution of the true worshipers, as Jezebel had been, yet she exalted in every way possible the priest of Baal above Jehoiada. For six years the growth of Joash had been marked with eager interest by his uncle, the high priest, who had kept the secret of his hiding place; and having now reached the age of seven, Jehoiada thought it a fitting time to break his long imprisonment in the temple. To this end he sought the help of both the temple and the palace guards. Of the former he was certain, since they would naturally oppose the worshipers of Baal, and scarcely less so of those in Athaliah's palace, where, though feared, she was also truly hated. Jehoiada's plot being carefully laid, he pledged his helpers to be true to the little boy whom he then brought forth from the temple chamber and declared to be their lawful king. Having secured the co-operation of the five captains over the five hundred royal bodyguards, he also gathered in

Jerusalem a larger number of the Levites as a reserve force. A rumor that some event of unusual interest was about to take place had doubtless been spread abroad, for all the people had come together in the temple. At the command of Jehoiaha one company of the guards kept watch at the palace, another at the Gate Sur, or Gate of the Foundation, another at the gate behind the barracks, and the remaining two guarded the safety of the little prince by keeping watch near the temple. It was reserved for the Levites to stand in close ranks on either side of him and protect his person. They were armed with spears and shields which David had taken as trophies and placed in the temple, and commanded to slay any one who might venture within their lines. The guards were arranged in two lines, beginning on either side of the porch and coming together beyond the altar, so as to form an impregnable hedge of triangular shape about the child-king. Within this space he was securely led by the high priest, and made to stand beside one of the pillars of the temple court. There in the midst of the Levites, the soldiers and the expectant people, upon the head of the boy king was placed the royal crown, and into his hand significantly given the Book of the Law. The pouring of the sacred oil upon his head was followed by cries of "Long live the King!" Then came loud blasts upon rams' horns, mingled with the softer tones from silver trumpets, and the shouts

or the people. This clamor reaching the ears of Athaliah in her palace, with a daring worthy of her mother, Jezebel, she hurried into the temple to find out what was happening. No sooner had she entered than the guards closed around her, and instantly in the scene before her was read her doom. There in kingly robes and crowned with a royal crown she beheld her little grandson, though as such still unknown to her, while from below she heard the shouts of the people as they joyfully proclaimed him king. Rending her clothes, she would have fled with the cry of "Treason! Treason!" But Jehoiaha demanded that she be led outside the temple lest the sacred courts be polluted with her blood. Thus guarded, she was brought forth to the horses' road to the king's house and here slain with the sword. Jehoiaha became regent for the young king and held the office for many years. He made a covenant with Jehovah, for himself, the boy king and the people, that they would be Jehovah's people; and also between the young king and his subjects, that they would be loyal to each other.

The story of Joash, the boy king, should remind us that each boy is called to be a king. He is to be a king, first of his own spirit, and "he who ruleth his own spirit is better than he that taketh a city." He is also to be a king over his surroundings, over the evil influences that encompass him. It is a question of the greatest importance what kind of a king he will be.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. In what city did Ben-hadad, king of Syria, seek Elisha?
2. What two visions deeply impressed Elisha's servant?
3. What affliction was visited upon the soldiers of Syria?
4. To what place were they led in their blindness?

5. What question did the king of Israel propound to Elisha?
6. What was Elisha's answer to the question?
7. What cheering words did Elisha speak to his servant when alarmed?
8. What three prayers of Elisha are mentioned in the lesson of last week?

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. Who was Athaliah? Answer: Daughter of Ahab and Jezebel and wife of Jehoram.
2. Who was Jehoram? Answer: Eld-est son of king Jehoshaphat, and his suc-cessor in Judah.
3. Who was Ahaziah? Answer: Son of Jehoram and Athaliah, an idolater who reigned as the fifth king of Judah.
4. Who was Jehosheba? Answer: She was the sister of Ahaziah, wife of the high priest.
5. Who was Jehoiada? Answer: He was the high priest in Judah. (For fuller explanations see Comments and Lesson Story.)
6. What cruelty was committed by Athaliah? Kings 11:1.
7. What did Jehosheba do with the babe Joash? 2 Kings 11:2, 3.
8. Where was he kept, by whom and how long? 2 Kings 11:2, 3.
9. Who reigned over the land for those years? 2 Kings 11:3.
10. In whom did Jehoida confide after seven years? 2 Kings 11:4.
11. What commandments did he make? 2 Kings 11:5-8.
12. Were his commandments fully obeyed? 2 Kings 11:9.
13. What did the high priest deliver to the captains? 2 Kings 11:10.
14. Where did the coronation occur? 2 Kings 11:12-14.
15. What did Athaliah hear, say and do on the occasion? 2 Kings 11:13, 14.
16. What four or five things were done in making Joash king? 2 Kings 11:12.
17. What became of Athaliah? 2 Kings 11:15, 16.
18. What covenant did Jehoiada make? 2 Kings 11:17.
19. What destructive work did the peo-ple accomplish? 2 Kings 11:18.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. In the light of the New Testament we can see more clearly than in the Old the fearful blunder of marriage between believers and unbelievers. Jehoram com-mitted—like Ahab—a fundamental sin in taking an idolatrous wife. Athaliah and her mother Jezebel were apparently as free from all beautiful, womanly, Christian graces as a stone is free from fruits and leaves. Through the marriage of Ahab to Jezebel in Israel and that of Jehoram to Athaliah in Judah the basest, cruelest and most degrading Baal wor-ship was introduced. "Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellow-ship have righteousness and iniquity?" (2 Cor. 6:14.) The same principle of separation should be regarded with ref-erence to partnerships in business. Chris-tian business, or professional, men should form partnerships only with men domi-nated by Christian principles.

2. The bereavements of the idola-trous Athaliah seem only to have hard-

ened the character of the queen mother. The true children of God are made more gentle and beautiful in character by af-flictions. They yield to them the peace-able fruits of righteousness. Afflictions work for believers in Christ a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. If we suffer with him, who was made per-fect through suffering, we shall be glo-rified through him.

3. Tricks, strategies and cruelties as horrible as those practiced in Jerusalem nearly three thousand years ago have been indulged within recent centuries in the very face—and sometimes under the cloak—of Christianity.

4. Christianity has placed a new and inspiring value upon childhood. Athaliah didn't shrink from murdering even her little grandchildren. He who said "Suf-fer the children to come unto me" put a new halo upon the brow of every little child. We are not yet fully appreciative

of the opportunities and duties concerning the little ones.

5. The temple must have been greatly neglected and set at naught when Joash and his nurse could be secretly sheltered within its enclosure for so many years. Any nation that neglects

God's temple is on the way to disaster.

6. Jehoiada was patient, steadfast and pious in his great purpose. His fidelity in the face of the corrupt public sentiment of his day is a bright example for those who in the midst of evil require encouragement and inspiration.

THE RESURRECTION MORN.

(Easter Lesson.)

John 20:1-18.

GOLDEN TEXT—The Lord is risen indeed. Luke 24:34.

Memory Verses—15, 16. Time—Easter morning, 30 A. D. Persons—Mary Magdalene, Peter, John and Jesus. Place.—Jerusalem.

DAILY READINGS.

April 10.... M—Matt. 16:21-28; 17:9-13; 20:17-19—Jesus Predicts His Resurrection.
 April 11.... T—Matt. 28:1-20—Matthew's Account of the Resurrection.
 April 12.... W—Mark 16:1-20—Mark's Account of the Resurrection.
 April 13.... T—Luke 21:1-53—Luke's Account of the Resurrection.
 April 14.... F—Acts 2:22-36; 3:13-21—The Apostles Proclaim the Resurrection.
 April 15.... S—John 21:1-23—The Post-Resurrection Life.
 April 16.... S—1 Cor. 15:12-34—The Significance of Christ's Resurrection.

INTRODUCTION.

Jesus was crucified on Friday. All scholars are practically agreed on this. They do disagree as to whether it was on the 14th or on the 15th day of the Jewish month Nisan. His burial took place late on Friday afternoon, but early enough so that it was completed before the sun set, for with that Friday ended and the Sabbath began (Mark 15:42; Luke 23:54-56; John 19:42). The burial was in a new tomb, rock hewn, that was in a garden near by the place of crucifixion. Since the tomb belonged to Joseph of Arimathea, the garden must either have been his, or at least it was under his control. A number of women, Galilean friends of Jesus, watched the removal of his body from the cross and saw

it laid away in the tomb (Luke 23:55). They began to prepare spices and ointments to place about the body, but this task of love was stopped by the beginning of the Sabbath day. How that Sabbath was spent we know only from the statement of Luke that "on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment." How sad must have been their thoughts, and how wearisome the rest of that day! As soon as the Sabbath was past they resumed the preparation of spices (Mark 16:1), and by the early light of the next day they were ready to embalm the body. And with their minds intent upon this purpose they visited the tomb, as all of the evangelists narrate.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 1. The first day of the week: All of the evangelists agree in naming this as the day on which the Lord arose. (Cf. Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:2; Luke 24:1.)
 Cometh Mary Magdalene: All of the evangelists speak of her as being one of

the early visitors at the tomb. John is the only one who speaks as though she came alone. Matthew says that another Mary accompanied her (28:1), Mark mentions the mother of James and Salome (16:1), and Luke speaks of Joanna,

1 Now on the first *day* of the week cometh Mary Magdalene early, while it was yet dark, unto the tomb, and seeth the stone taken away from the tomb. 2 She runneth therefore, and cometh to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple

whom Jesus loved, and saith unto them, They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we know not where they have laid him. 3 Peter therefore went forth, and the other disciple, and tuesday went toward the tomb. 4 And they ran

Mary the mother of James, and other women, no fewer than four at least (24:10). Now it is evident that she could not have visited the tomb for the first time alone and at the same time in company with others. The only way we can explain John's mention of her alone is to understand that he ignored the fact that other women were with her. What was his reason for doing this? He is clear and definite in his statement that Jesus after his resurrection appeared to her first and alone. In this he is corroborated by the appendix to Mark (16:9). If Mary Magdalene started with other women to visit the tomb, there is only one possible way in which she alone could see the Lord. She must have become separated from them. It seems, according to John, that as soon as she saw the stone rolled away she turned and went to tell Peter and John. Luke (24:3) and Mark (16:5) expressly state and Matthew implies (28:6) that the women entered into the tomb. The separation therefore probably took place at the moment when they saw the stone rolled from the door of the tomb. Mary Magdalene turned back to inform the male disciples while the other women remained at the tomb, probably intending to await the return of the Magdalene and the others. The vision of the angels, however, diverted them from their purpose, and by the time Mary Magdalene had returned they were gone (Matt. 28:7, 8, 9). **Early, while it was yet dark:** There is entire agreement among the four evangelists that the hour was early, though they use different phrases to describe the time. Matthew says they came as it began to dawn (28:1); Mark says, very early when the sun

was risen (16:1); and Luke says, at early dawn (24:1). If we regard the time of Matthew, Luke and John as that of starting, and Mark's as the time of arrival at the tomb, they will agree perfectly. **Seeth the stone taken away:** All the evangelists notice this, especially Mark (16:4).

2. **She runneth:** Leaving the other women to draw near the tomb. She saw nothing but the stone rolled away. **Simon Peter:** In spite of his fall Peter is still regarded as one of the leaders of the apostles. **To the other disciple whom Jesus loved:** (Cf. 13:23; 21:7-20.) This was John, as is almost universally agreed. Note, however, that the form of expression shows Peter as well as John was the object of the Lord's affection. It seems that these two apostles lodged apart from the others (Matt. 28:8). This was probably rendered necessary by the fact that the mother of Jesus lodged with John (19:27). **They have taken away, etc.:** She seems to have reached this conclusion hastily, though correctly, from the appearance of the stone rolled away. This is characteristic of a woman's intuitive decisions. When she uses the plural pronoun "we" she implies that she had not gone to the tomb alone. By the pronoun "they" she may have meant the Jews or the keepers of the garden.

3. Notice the expressive form of the sentence. Peter, as usual, leads in his decision, and the other acts on his (Peter's) judgment.

4. **The other disciple outran Peter:** The tradition uniformly regards John as the younger man, hence his ability to outrun Peter.

both together: and the other disciple outran Peter, and came first to the tomb; 5 and stooping and looking in, he seeth the linen cloths lying; yet entered he not in. 6 Simon Peter therefore also cometh, following him, and entered into the tomb; and he beholdeth the linen cloths lying, 7 and the napkin, that was upon his head, not lying with the linen cloths, but rolled up in a place by itself. 8 Then entered in therefore the other disciple also, who came first to the tomb, and he

saw, and believed. 9 For as yet they knew not the scripture, that he must rise again from the dead. 10 So the disciples went away again unto their own home.

11 But Mary was standing without at the tomb weeping; so, as she wept, she stooped and looked into the tomb; 12 and she beholdeth two angels in white sitting, one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. 13 And they say unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? She saith unto them, Be-

5. **Seeth the linen cloths lying:** This is a hint that the body has not been removed, for it would not have been taken away naked. **Yet entered he not in:** An indication of awe and wonder. This was characteristic of John.

6. **Entered into the tomb:** "Without a look or a pause." This is characteristic of Peter. He is practical and resolute, and wishes to probe the mystery thoroughly. **Beholdeth:** A different word is used from that in verse 5. John "seeth," glances at; Peter "beholdeth," gazes at earnestly and intently.

7. **The napkin, etc.:** John had not seen this. It indicated a calm awakening without excitement. The body had clearly not been removed by either enemies or friends.

8. **Then entered . . . the other disciple:** It was clear that the Lord was not there, so he no longer hesitated to enter. **He saw:** The state of things in the tomb as described above. **Believed:** He evidently believed more than that the body had been removed, as Mary Magdalene reported; and yet it can scarcely be said that he fully and clearly believed in the resurrection. Their state of knowledge was not such as to lead him to this. At a later time the charge of unbelief in the resurrection is laid against the eleven, including John (Mark 16:11). Yet John believed; that is, he believed that Jesus was alive. There was still a mystery to him about it, but he

calmly accepts the truth so far as he could grasp it.

9. This verse shows that the disciples did not arrive at a belief in the resurrection from some interpretation which they put on the Scriptures, but believed first in the resurrection, and then from this came to an understanding of the Scriptures.

10. **Went away:** To await further events, for nothing more could be learned at the tomb. **Mary was standing, etc.:** Peter went away perplexed; John went away believing; Mary remained weeping. John is the only one of the three that is not in pressing need of further light. This was given to both Mary and Peter before the day was past (v. 14 and Luke 24:34).

12. **Beholdeth two angels:** Skeptics have found a difficulty in the fact that the first women at the tomb saw the angels (Luke 24:), Peter and John did not, but now Mary does. Godet well says, "Angels are not immovable and visible after the fashion of stones."

13. **Because they have taken, etc.:** She uses the same language to the angels which she had used to Peter and John, except now she says "my Lord" instead of "the Lord" and "I know not" instead of "we know not." This shows that her mind was dwelling on that one fact, and in her grief she had come to think of the loss as peculiarly her own. She was wholly absorbed in the one

cause they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him. 14 When she had thus said, she turned herself back, and beholdeth Jesus standing, and knew not that it was Jesus. 15 Jesus saith unto her, Woman, why weepest thou? whom seekest thou? She, supposing him to be the gardener, saith unto him, Sir, if thou hast borne him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him, and I will take him away. 16 Jesus

saith unto her, Mary. She turneth herself, and saith unto him in Hebrew, Rabboni; which is to say, Teacher. 17 Jesus saith to her, Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended unto the Father: but go unto my brethren, and say to them, I ascend unto my Father and your Father, and my God and your God. 18 Mary Magdalene cometh and telleth the disciples, I have seen the Lord; and that he had said these things unto her.

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thought as to the way in which she could recover her Lord.

14. **She turned herself:** Either the vision of the angels made no impression upon her, or she felt the presence of another person approaching from her rear; or the angels made a glance or a gesture towards the Lord approaching. **Knew not that it was Jesus:** She was so absorbed in the one thought that the body of Jesus had been taken away that she was not prepared to recognize him. It is quite possible for a person to be so absorbed in one point of view that he can not recognize some other to be the correct one, though it is actually demonstrated before him. It is not necessary at all to infer that Mary's mind was miraculously restrained from recognizing Jesus.

15. **Whom seekest thou?** Jesus asked her the same question which the angels asked her, and then added another which shows that he knew that her grief was caused by the loss of some one. These are his first words to a human being after the resurrection. **Supposing him to be the gardener:** She is still so absorbed in her one idea that the voice of Jesus, the most personal of all human manifestations, does not shake her out of it. As long as she held so strongly to the thought that the body had been removed, it was natural to suppose that this was the gardener. It is evident that she regards him as a

friend, though it is his act which has caused her this grief.

16. **Jesus saith, . . . Mary:** There was a pause in which Jesus gave her opportunity to recognize him, but in her grief she turns back to the tomb. The calling of her name arouses her and shakes her out of her false presupposition. **In Hebrew:** They had probably spoken in Greek up to this point, but her surprise and joy lead her to express herself in the tongue that was most natural to her. **Which is to say, Teacher:** That is, Mary did not by this title recognize his higher nature, but only that he was the master or teacher of his disciples.

17. **Touch me not:** Evidently Mary had run to him and seized him, and by these words he restrains her. **For I am not yet, etc.:** We can not understand exactly why this is a reason that she should not touch him. This much is evident: They were not to continue the old forms of earthly relationship and intercourse. **I am not yet ascended:** This can refer to nothing else than his ascension to heaven, as described in Acts 1. It was too prominent a feature in the closing events of Christ's life for the name to be applied to some less conspicuous event without an indication of this fact. We are not able to grasp the significance of this as a reason that he should not be touched. **My Father and your Father:** He separates the sonship of men from

his own. Jesus never confuses them. He never says "Our Father," including himself in the pronoun. This shows that he recognized his sonship as essentially unlike that which may be affirmed of other

men. At the same time, however, the language indicates the close union between him and them.

18. All doubt and misgiving have vanished from her mind.

COMMENTS.

It is admitted by all scholars that without the faith of the apostles in the resurrection the church would never have been born. It may almost with equal confidence be affirmed that without the fact of the resurrection the faith of the apostles in that event would never have been born. Hence the resurrection appears as the central truth of our faith, and the one mighty support of all of the centuries of Christian progress and history.

The Resurrection is Incontestable and Important. "The resurrection of the Lord Jesus, of which an account is given in this chapter, is one of the most important doctrines of the Christian religion, and is attested by the strongest evidence that can be adduced in favor of any ancient fact. Let it be considered: (1) That he had often foretold his own death and resurrection (see Matt. 12:40; 16:21; 20:19). (2) There was no doubt that he was really dead. Of course the Jews, the Romans, and the disciples, were all equally well satisfied. (3) Every proper precaution was taken to prevent his removal by stealth. A guard, usually consisting of sixty men, was placed there for the express purpose of keeping him, and the sepulchre was secured by a large stone, and by a seal. (4) On the third day the body was missing. In this all were agreed. The high priest did not dare to call that in question. They labored, therefore, to account for it. The disciples affirmed that he was alive. The Jews hired the Roman soldiers to affirm that he was stolen while they slept, and succeeded in making many of the people believe it. This account of the Jews is attended with the following difficulties and absurdities: (1) The Roman guard was composed usually of sixty men, and

they were stationed there for the express purpose of guarding the body of Jesus. (2) The punishment of sleeping while on guard in the Roman army was death, and it is perfectly incredible that they should expose themselves in this manner to death. (3) The disciples were few in number, unarmed, weak and timid. They had just fled before those who took Jesus in the garden, and how can it be believed that in so short a time they would dare to attempt to take from a Roman guard of armed men what they were expressly set to defend? (4) How could the disciples presume that they would find them asleep; or, if they should, how was it possible to remove the stone and the body without awaking one of their number? (5) The regularity and order of the grave-clothes (John 20:6,7) show that the body had not been stolen. When men rob graves of the bodies of the dead they do not wait coolly to fold up the grave-clothes and lay them carefully by themselves. (6) If the soldiers were asleep, how did they, or how could they know that the disciples stole the body away? If they were awake, why did they suffer it? The whole account, therefore, was intrinsically absurd. On the other hand, the account given by the disciples was perfectly natural. (1) They account for the reason why the soldiers did not see the Saviour when he arose. Terrified at the vision of an angel, they became as dead men. (2) They affirm that they saw him. All the apostles affirmed this, and many others. (3) They affirmed it in Jerusalem, in the presence of the Jews, before the high priest and the people. (See the Acts of the Apostles.) If the Jews really believed the account which they them-

selves had given, why did they not apprehend the apostles and prove them guilty of the theft, and of falsehood—things which they never attempted and which show, therefore, that they did not credit their own report? (4) In regard to the Saviour they could not be deceived. They had been with him three years; they knew him as a friend; they again ate and drank with him; they put their fingers into his hands and side; they conversed with him; they were with him forty days. There were enough of them to bear witness. Law commonly requires not more than one or two competent witnesses; but here were twelve plain, honest men, who confirmed in all places, and at all times, that they had seen him. Can it be possible that they could be deceived? Then all faith in testimony must be given up. (5) They gave every possible evidence of their sincerity. They were persecuted, ridiculed, scourged, and put to death for affirming this. Yet not one of them ever expressed the least doubt of its truth. They bore everything rather than to deny that they had seen him. They had no motive in doing this but the love of truth. They obtained no wealth by it, no honor, no pleasure. They

gave themselves up to great and unparalleled sufferings, going from land to land, crossing almost every sea and enduring the dangers and privations of almost every clime for the simple object of affirming everywhere that a Saviour died and rose. If they knew this was an imposition—and if it had been they would have known it—in what way is this remarkable conduct to be accounted for? Do men conduct in this way for naught? and especially in a plain case, where all that can be required is the testimony of the senses? (6) The world believed them. Three thousand of the Jews themselves believed in the risen Saviour, on the day of Pentecost, but fifty days after his resurrection (Acts 2:41). Multitudes of other Jews believed during the lives of the apostles. Thousands of Gentiles believed also, and in three hundred years the belief that Jesus rose had spread over and changed the whole Roman empire. Had the apostles been deceivers, that was the age in which they could most easily have been detected. Yet that was the age when converts were most rapidly multiplied and God affixed his seal to their testimony that it was true. (Barnes.)

THE RESURRECTION STORY.

After the death of Jesus upon the cross and his burial in Joseph's tomb comes the glad story of the resurrection. This is told in all of the Gospels. While each differs from the other, yet there is no radical contradiction in the four narrations. Each records the early coming of the women to the sepulchre. Along with Mary Magdalene at early dawn, came also Mary, the mother of Jesus, Salome and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward. They came with the sweet spices prepared for his body only to find the tomb emptied of its treasure, and in bitter disappointment Mary Magdalene returns to the disciples with the sad message, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we know not where

they have laid him," Deeply stirred, Peter and John run toward the sepulchre, and Mary follows. The disciple of love first reaches the tomb and looking in, reverently remains without, but Peter, on coming, boldly enters, and is followed by John. The word of Mary is confirmed. They see the empty sepulchre, yet on looking in more closely they behold, with mingled awe and wonder, the winding sheet in which had been wrapped the body of their Lord and the napkin that was about his head carefully folded and laid separately within. Then John, beholding the empty sepulchre and remembering the Master's word that he would rise again, "saw and believed." With emotion too deep for words, the disciples

depart, but Mary lingers at the tomb, weeping. She is too much absorbed by her grief to notice the carefully folded sheet and napkin, or to be startled even at sight of the two angels within the sepulchre, who question "Woman, why weepest thou?" and answers in the sad refrain, "They have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him." Turning away "in the very restlessness of her grief," she sees one whom she supposes to be the gardener. "Who else could be in the garden so early in the morning?" At sight of the stranger hope revives, and with a love far transcending reason she assures him that if he will only tell her where he has borne her Lord she "will take him away." Then she is startled at hearing the name "Mary" spoken in accents tender and fa-

miliar, and on looking up, enraptured, at the vision of her risen Lord, with the glad cry, "Rabboni, Master!" she would have clasped his feet in prostrate adoration, but is gently hindered by the Saviour's words, "Touch me not, for I am not ascended unto my Father." The vision seemed too glorious to be true, and Mary would touch the Master's feet to assure herself of his reality. Although denied this sacred privilege, yet to her was given the greater one of heralding the glad news of the resurrection. She who at early morn had borne the sad message: "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we know not where they have laid him," was now to go quickly and tell the sorrowing ones, "He is risen from the dead," and "I have seen the Lord!"

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. Name three or four prophecies of Jesus concerning his resurrection. Matt. 16:21; Matt. 17:9; 17:23 and 20:19.

2. What did Jesus imply with regard to his resurrection in his declaration, "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up?" John 2:19-21.

3. What striking reference to Jesus' resurrection is found in the psalms of David? Psa. 16:8-10.

4. What apostle, and on what occasion, uses this prophecy? Acts 2:29-31.

5. In what sense is Jesus himself the resurrection? John 11:25-26.

6. What is true as to the belief or unbelief of the disciples before and immediately after the resurrection of Christ, and concerning it? John 20:9 and Mark 16:14.

7. What is it in your judgment to "know the power of his resurrection?" Phil. 3:10.

8. What is the nature of the resurrection body? 1 Cor. 15:37, 40, 44, 50.

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. On what day of the week did Jesus rise from the grave? John 20:1.

2. What were a few of the first evidences of the resurrection? John 20:5-7.

3. What first message did Mary Magdalene bring to Peter and John? John 20:2.

4. What immediate effect did the message have upon them? John 20:3, 4.

5. What revealed order, leisure and deliberation on the part of our Lord in rising from the dead? John 20:5-7.

6. What effect did the visit of Peter

and John to the sepulchre have upon them? John 20:8.

7. Whom did Mary Magdalene see as she, weeping, looked into the tomb? John 20:12.

8. What question was asked, and what the answer? John 20:13.

9. When Mary first beheld Jesus did she know him? John 20:14.

10. What two questions did Jesus ask her? John 20:15.

11. Whom did Mary suppose him to be, and why? John 20:16.

12. What caused her to realize it was Jesus who spoke to her? John 20:16.

13. What did Jesus then deny her, reveal to her and command her? John 20:17.

14. How often, to whom and under what circumstances did our Lord appear

on the first Lord's day? Matt. 28:1-10; John 20:16; Luke 24:34 and 1 Cor. 15:5; Luke 24:25-31; Mark 16:14 and Luke 24:36-40.

15. If one believes in the truth of the resurrection ought he to have any trouble concerning the miracles recorded in Scripture?

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE RESURRECTION OF JESUS.

1. If Jesus rose from the dead, believers, too, shall rise. He is the first-fruits of them that slept. He that believeth in him shall never die.

2. If he be not risen, then our faith is vain, and we are yet in our sins, and they who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished (1 Cor. 15:17, 18).

3. In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as angels in heaven (Matt. 22:30). God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. It would a happy experience for husbands and wives, parents and children, to meet in the resurrection, not as the frail and erring mortals they are here in this present state, but as "angels in heaven" through the power of God and the promises of the Scriptures. Heaven and the glories of the resurrection are left largely to the imagination, and we may limn its glories and its joys to our heart's sweet content, assured that we shall be "satisfied" and that "eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, the things God hath prepared for them that love him." No tears; no night; no death; no going any more out; rest for the people of

God, when peace shall be as a river and righteousness as the waves of the sea. But heaven or the resurrection is not a mere siesta. There, as here, "His servants shall serve him," yet in a higher and more joy-giving way. There we may still grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. There we shall be like him, for we shall some day see him as he is. Those prepared shall sit upon his right hand and his left. But those especially who shall have come out of great tribulation and shall have washed and made white their robes in the blood of the suffering but triumphant Lamb, shall stand in the very forefront of the throne, and the innocent babes that have gone from their mothers' arms shall be, in the watch-care of the angels, privileged to behold the face of the Father.

4. "Blessed is he that hath part in the first resurrection." He that hath Christ hath the resurrection and hath the life. Enlightenment through Christ, life in Christ and glorious fruits in him—these are both safe and satisfying. Upon this life, this conjunction with Christ and these fruits in Christ the second death hath no power (Rev. 20:6).

Lesson IV.

April 23.

JOASH REPAIRS THE TEMPLE.

2 Kings 11:21—12:16. (Print 12:1-16.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly.
1 Chron. 29:9.

Memory Verse—11. **Suggested Reading**—Chapters 12 and 17. **Time**—864 B. C.
Persons—Joash, Jehoiada, the priests, the King's scribe and the workmen. **Place**—Jerusalem.

DAILY READINGS.

April 17... M—2 Kings 11:21—12:16; 2 Chron. 24:1-14—Joash Repairs the Temple.
April 18.... T—2 Chron. 24:15-22—The Ingratitude of Joash.
April 19... W—2 Kings 12:17-21; 2 Chron. 24:25-27—The Bad Ending of a Good Beginning.
April 20.... T—1 Sam. 31:1-12—The Bad End of Saul's Good Beginning.
April 21.... F—Judges 16:1-31—The Bad End of Samson's Good Beginning.
April 22.... S—2 Chron. 33:1-20—The Repentance of Manasseh.
April 23.... S—2 Kings 22:1, 2; 23:21-30—A Wholly Consistent Godly Life.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

The lesson for the present week begins immediately after the previous one. The king was as yet but a child of seven years, and the affairs of the government must, for quite a period, be performed by other hands. Jehoiada, the high priest, probably acted as regent. This is implied by the statement in verse 2, that Joash did that which was right all the days wherein Jehoiada instructed him. After some years the young king proceeded to the administration and improvement of the temple. In the natural course of events some repairs would be needed on the temple, for at least a

century and a quarter had passed since its erection by Solomon. But more than the ravages of time had made havoc with the sacred building. While, according to the conclusion reached in the last lesson, Athaliah allowed the worship of Jehovah to continue in the temple, she nevertheless made no effort to keep it in repair. On the contrary, according to 2 Chron. 24:7, the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, broke open the temple and despoiled it of its sacred utensils and furniture. There was need, therefore, of improvement, and Joash made this the first task of his reign.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 1. Seventh year: The birth of Joash was not far removed either way from the time of his father's death. **Jehoash:** His name has two forms. That is the longer one, while the contracted form is Joash. Compare Jehoram and Joram; Jehoahaz and Joahaz, and Azariah and Uziah. Zibiah of Beer-

sheba: Her name is mentioned because on his accession she became the queen-mother, the first woman of the realm. Throughout the history of Judah, the historian tells the names of the mothers of the kings.

2. All the days wherein, etc.: This verse implies that Joash did not continue

4 And Jehoash said to the priests, All the money of the hallowed things that is brought into the house of Jehovah, in current money, the money of the persons for whom each man is rated, and all the money that it cometh into any man's heart to bring into the house of

Jehovah, 5 let the priests take it to them, every man from his acquaintance; and they shall repair the breaches of the house, wheresoever any breach shall be found. 6 But it was so, that in the three and twentieth year of king Jehoash the priests had not repaired the breaches

all his life to serve Jehovah uniformly well. That which the author of Kings hints at is expressly stated by the Chronicler (2 Chron. 24:17-19). Joash lapsed into idolatry. Jehoiada the priest instructed him: This indicates that Jehoiada was practically the regent of the kingdom. This must have continued for ten or twelve years.

3. High places: These are not idolatrous shrines, but sites of the worship of Jehovah in violation of the law that there was to be but one altar, and that at Jerusalem. These high places had not been molested during the reign of any king of Judah, and were not interfered with till the time of Hezekiah. Jehoiada evidently did not regard them as idolatrous.

4. Jehoash said: It is one of the mysteries why this movement to repair the temple originated with the king and not with the Jehoiada. This priest seems to have lacked in ability to manage this work (cf. v. 6). Money of the hallowed things: That is all holy or consecrated money. Any money which came into the temple treasury was so regarded. The king specifies that all of this is to be applied to the repairing of the temple. In current money, etc.: According to this the payment was to be made in customary money, which was not coined but weighed. The margin offers a translation which gives an entirely different sense. It reads: "The money of every one that passeth the numbering." Every male Israelite over twenty years of age paid a half shekel annually (Ex. 30:13; Matt. 17:24). If the margin is accepted as correct, this was one source from which the consecrated money was re-

ceived. The money of the persons, etc.: Sometimes special vows were made in which the persons making the vows devoted themselves or others belonging to them to Jehovah. They were then required to redeem the devoted person by the payment of a sum which varied with the age, sex and property of the person. Money derived from this source was to be used for the temple repairs. The money that cometh, etc.: This refers to free-will offerings. There are thus three sources specified, (1) from the poll-tax, according to the marginal reading, (2) from the payment of vows, (3) from free-will offerings.

5. Let the priests: This is made clearer by a comparison of 2 Chron. 24:5, where the priests and Levites are directed to go to every city of Judah and collect the money. This is what is meant here. Each priest was to go to the men with whom he was acquainted and collect from them the poll-tax, the vow-money and the free gifts.

6. The breaches: Every kind and degree of decay and dilapidation. Many of these were caused by age. Three and twentieth year: It must have been some years after the accession of Joash before he gave orders to repair the temple, for he would know nothing of what was needed at the age of seven. We are not to understand, therefore, that he waited twenty-three years before he observed that no progress was being made, but probably only two or three. He was at this time thirty years of age. Had not repaired the breaches: Just why we are not told, but it was evidently because the money that should have been devoted

of the house. 7 Then king Jehoash called for Jehoiada the priest, and for the *other* priests, and said unto them, Why repair ye not the breaches of the house? now therefore take no *more* money from your acquaintance, but deliver it for the breaches of the house. 8 And the priests consented that they should take no *more* money from the people, neither repair the breaches of the house.

9 But Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in the lid of it, and set it beside the altar, on the right side as one cometh into the house of Jehovah; and the priests that kept the threshold put therein all the money that was brought into the house of Jehovah. 10 And it was so, when they saw that there was much money in the chest, that the king's scribe and the high priest came up, and they put up in bags and

to this purpose was being appropriated for the priests' personal use.

7. **Why repair ye not? etc.:** The answer which they must certainly have made to the king is not given, and in its absence we can not be certain of the real reason. In the comment on the previous verse it has been suggested that the reason was because the priests were devoting the money to their own personal use. During the state of apostasy in the reign of Athaliah the revenue of the priests must have been decreased, and they had fallen into the habit of making use of other money which came into the temple for their maintenance. This custom could not be readily and immediately stopped. The proposal of the king meant a curtailment of their incomes, and this they had found impossible to bear. The king does not indicate that they had been guilty of criminal fault, and it seems likely that their sole error was in not possessing business capacity sufficient to increase the temple revenue to such an extent as to provide for their support and leave a surplus with which to repair the temple. **Take no more money from your acquaintance:** That is, they were to cease making personal solicitations for funds. Instead of this, free-will gifts were to be put in a box placed beside the altar. **Deliver it:** This means "allow it to be delivered."

8. **The priests consented:** They were aware of their incapacity for this work,

and so they surrender a task which they could not perform. There was an element of unselfishness in this, however, for they were surrendering a source of income which provided no inconsiderable part of their support.

9. **Jehoiada the priest took a chest:** The Chronicler said this was done at the king's command (2 Chron. 24:8). This accords with the narrative in Kings where Joash is made to take the lead in this movement. **Beside the altar:** This was outside of the temple, and so this agrees with the location of this chest given in 2 Chron. 24:8. **On the right side:** On the north. **The priests . . . put therein:** This chest was within the court of the priests and into it the congregation was not allowed to go. Hence they handed the money to the priests, and by them it was put into the box. The treasury near which Jesus stood, and into which he saw many casting their gifts, was in the court of women and any Israelite could approach it (Mark 12:41-44).

10. **The king's scribe:** Or secretary (margin). **The high priest:** This is the first use of this title since the days of Aaron. **Came up:** The Chronicler tells that the Levites carried the chest into the king's office, where it was opened. **Put up in bags and counted the money:** The entire process was business-like and accurate and makes more emphatic the statement of verse 15, that *they reckoned not with the workmen.*

counted the money that was found in the house of Jehovah. 11 And they gave the money that was weighed out into the hands of them that did the work, that had the oversight of the house of Jehovah: and they paid it out to the carpenters and the builders, that wrought upon the house of Jehovah, 12 and to the masons and the hewers of stone, and for buying timber and hewn stone to repair the breaches of the house of Jehovah, and for all that was laid out for

the house to repair it. 13 But there were not made for the house of Jehovah cups of silver, snuffers, basins, trumpets, any vessels of gold, or vessels of silver, of the money that was brought into the house of Jehovah; 14 for they gave that to them that did the work, and repaired therewith the house of Jehovah. 15 Moreover they reckoned not with the men, into whose hand they delivered the money to give to them that did the work; for they dealt faithfully.

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11. The money was given out in gross sums to the contractors or overseers and the expenditure of it was left in their hands. **Carpenters, etc.:** Four classes of workmen are mentioned: (1) carpenters, (2) builders, (3) masons and (4) stone cutters.

12. **Timber, etc.:** Three classes of material are specified: (1) timber, (2) stone, and (3) all other material. The contractor paid all workmen and purchased all material.

13, 14. The purpose of these verses is to show that the work was not delayed by the expenditure of some of the money for vessels. The Chronicler (24:14) tells that

when the work was completed the surplus money was used for this purpose. The desecration of the temple furniture and utensils by using them in the temple of Baal necessitated the making of new ones (2 Chron. 24:7).

15. The overseers or contractors were known to be conscientious and they were trusted implicitly. Since these men were probably priests (2 Kings 11:18; 12:11; 2 Chron. 24:12), it is clear that their honesty had not been doubted.

16. This verse shows that the priests did not lose all of their income by the new arrangement, for they were permitted to retain the revenues which properly belonged to them.

COMMENTS.

The Temple and the Priesthood. The most important result of the incidents mentioned in this and the preceding lesson is one which affects the history and the religious institutions of Israel. This lesson brings the temple again into prominence and from this time forth it enjoys a prominence in the history which it does not seem to have enjoyed during the previous century. The history of the building of the temple takes up a considerable portion of the space devoted to Solomon's reign, but from Rehoboam to Athaliah it is scarcely ever more than mentioned.

During all of these reigns, high places on which Jehovah was worshiped were left unmolested (1 Kings 15:14; 22:43; 2 Kings 12:3), and these were rivals of the temple. The rural people would go to these rather than to Jerusalem, but with the beginning of Joash's reign "the people of the land" are found in the temple, and that sacred structure from this time forth grows in importance and prominence. Along with the increase in importance of the temple may be noted an increased prominence of the priesthood. Jehoiada is called the high priest (v.

10), a title which has been applied to no member of the sacerdotal family since the time of Aaron. The title continued in vogue from this time and Jehoiada seems to have been regarded as a sort of second founder of the priestly line (Jer. 29:26). Probably his importance was due to the fact that for a time he was virtually the ruler of the land. Henceforth both priest and temple, so intimately related to one another, are to fill a larger space in the nation's history. They are also to contribute their part in the development of that faith which is destined to be the cradle of a still greater faith and to give to the world its Saviour.

The Character and Conduct of Joash. This king appears at his best in this lesson. If his life had come to an end simultaneously with that of the high priest, Jehoiada, or after he had repaired the temple, it would have been far better for his memory. He was essentially a weak man. He was not distinguished for strength of intellect nor for moral fiber. Lack of independence and subserviency to influence are noticeable traits of his character. As long as Jehoiada lived he had a support upon which he could lean, but with the death of this counsellor and guide he became the tool of designing men who longed for the return of such idolatrous days as they had enjoyed in the time of Athaliah. The princes of Judah flattered him by their cringing obsequiousness and he permitted them to restore the forbidden and corrupting Ashterah worship (2 Chron. 24:17). To his weakness he added downright wickedness when in his rage he commanded the stoning to death of Zechariah, the son of his benefactor, Jehoiada, because he had rebuked him for his sin and predicted calamity as a consequence. This is mentioned by our Lord as one of the great national crimes which stained the history of Judah (Luke 11:51). Joash also showed weakness in that he did not resist Hazael of Damascus, but spoiled the temple and the palace of their treas-

ures to purchase peace with him. This and other acts of weakness and wickedness so embittered his subjects against Joash that a conspiracy was formed against him and he was slain. "He was the king of Judah who came to a violent end at the hands of his own subjects, and the discontent was so great that he was not even buried in the royal sepulchres. Such was the disgraceful end of one whose childhood was marked by such wonderful providences."

The Conduct of the Priests. The commentators are greatly divided over the question of the priests' culpability in not pushing the repair of the temple. No word of censure of them is found in the text, other than the question of the king, why they had not performed it (v. 7), and the statement in Chronicles (24:5), that they hastened it not. As further proof that they were not blamed very deeply, it should be noted that under the new arrangement they had charge of the chest, and those priests that guarded the door received the money and deposited it in the chest. In spite of this, some have charged them with embezzling the funds. This is certainly without foundation in fact, but it is as impossible to acquit them of all blame as it is to convict them of dishonesty. The priests must have manifested lack of zeal and an incapacity for the work. As servants of the temple, zeal, prudence and energy were naturally to be expected of them, but these were lacking. As in all other similar cases their indifference and neglect dried up the fountains of liberality and the work languished. Suspicion was created in the popular mind, and while there may not have been culpability on the part of the priests, the question of the king and the failure of the people to give show that it was wise to make such an arrangement as would remove all cloud from the action.

The Wisdom of the New Arrangement. "The circumstantial description of the

box, its arrangement and position, show that it was intended to free the priests from any suspicion, just or not, which attached to them. If the suspicion was unjust, they were most interested in a public arrangement for the reception of these contributions which should free them from it. It is enough to suppose that, when all the money, that intended for themselves and that intended for the repairs, came into their hands, the distribution of it according to the intentions of the givers may have been uncertain and imperfect. At any rate, the givers could not be certain that their money would reach its destined object. Any such popular distrust would, according to all experience, speedily reduce the contributions to a very languid flow. The chest arrangement now accomplished two objects. It permitted the giver to divide his offering for the temple from the offering for the priests, and to see for himself that it was at once put where it could not be applied otherwise than as he intended. The true force of verse 16 is that at this time the revenues of the temple were divided and definitely appropriated, and that the sorts of revenue there mentioned were specifically set apart for the support of the priests. When the priests' share in the transaction was limited to the reception of the money and its immediate deposition in a receptacle, which is expressly declared to have been in the most public place in the temple enclosure, it was impossible to suspect them any longer of dishonesty, unless they were most accomplished rogues. There is no express mention of any dishonesty in the record, but this arrangement with the chest has un-

questionably suggested a suspicion which has always been felt by readers of the passage." (Summer.)

The Restoration of the Temple. "It is true that God does not dwell in temples made with hands (1 Kings 7:27; Acts 7:48); we can worship him as well in a ruin as in the most magnificent church. But when the building in which a congregation assembles to worship God, to hear his word, and to receive the means of grace, is left ruinous, God does not receive the honor which belongs to him. Where the churches fall to ruins, there the religion and piety also fall into decay; but where there is love of God and joy in his word, there no ruinous churches are seen. A time in which magnificent palaces, theatres, and ballrooms are repaired or built at great expense, but in which the houses of God are left small, wretched, dirty, and ruinous, is a time of religious decay, and resembles the time of Athaliah in Judah. The apostle says of the Christian Church: 'For ye are the temple of the living God' (2 Cor. 6:16). This temple also may in time become ruinous through unbelief, worldly life and behavior and immorality. Where are the congregations in which there is nothing ruinous or decayed, in which nothing could be improved? How many are in ruins and are ready to fall! He who destroys the temple of God, or allows it to be destroyed, him will God destroy (1 Cor. 3:17). We can not indeed repair these breaches by money. They can only be repaired by coming to the living stone, which is rejected of men, but which is chosen of God (1 Pet. 2:4-6)." (Lange.)

LESSON STORY.

Not long after Joash came to the throne of Judah was begun the work of repairing the temple. This sacred shrine had been robbed of its treasures to adorn the temple of Baal, and through long neg-

lect had also fallen into wretched disrepair. How strange it was that the priests, familiar with its condition, should have remained so long indifferent to its needs! Yet no hint is given that

they even suggested the work to which the young king set himself with so much zeal. This enterprise naturally appealed to him, for in the temple had been lived his earliest days, and to this safe retreat he owed his life and throne. An order was issued to the priests to reserve all the regular offerings, such as those from the poll tax, from the payment of vows, and from free-will offerings, for the one great work of repairing the temple; and in addition to this they were expected to secure personal offerings from their friends and acquaintances. All funds were to be given into their hands, and they should be held personally responsible for the repairs. The king's call met with a hearty response from the people, whose offerings for some time poured in a continuous stream into the treasury; but although years passed by, the priests, to whom the sacred task had been committed, were still allowing the temple to remain untouched, even though breaches gaped in the outer walls and the very foundations were insecure. After rebuking their negligence and charging them to "take no more money," but to "deliver it for the breaches of the house," the king discharges them altogether, and takes the work into his own hands. Jehoiada is forthwith directed to place a chest with an opening in the lid on the right hand side of the altar, into which should hereafter be deposited the free-will offerings of the people. All contributions were to be handed to the priests, they only being allowed to stand in the court of the priests, where the chest should be placed and by them cast into the treasury. Under this arrangement far less would be reserved for these custodians of the temple than formerly, yet they seem to have yielded to the new order of things without a murmur. The chest, when filled, was to be carried by the Levites, unopened, into the palace and its contents there weighed and counted by the king's secretary and the high priest. Its value having been fully

estimated, it should then be given over without bond into the hands of reliable architects, who should make no delay in expending it for the labor of skilled carpenters and masons and for all necessary materials to repair the temple. "The king's business requireth haste" would have been a happy watchword for these earnest workers. By this time, through the slothfulness of the priests, the people had grown indifferent toward the temple; a sure sign of their disaffection having been seen in the marked decrease in offerings. So serious had become the spiritual drought that all the streams of liberality were fast drying up, but now through the stirring appeal of the king, and his effort to "provide things honest in the sight of all men," their old love is revived, and with restored confidence they bring glad offerings into the treasury. The repairs having been completed, all surplus funds were expended for the inner furnishings.

It is sad to think that the innocent boy king and the zealous repairer of the temple should in his latter days have fallen into gross idolatry and crime. As long as he remained under the influence of the high priest he was safe, but in the death of Jehoiada he seems to have lost his essential moral and spiritual prop. Thus Joash, raised under the best influences, and, as a young man, under these influences accomplishing much good, yet failed in the end, because his worthy deeds resulted from an outer control rather than an inner principle, "a warmth from without and not a fire from within." Choosing the wicked young princes of Judah for his companions he was quickly led astray. Few can retain spiritual health in the midst of moral malaria, or "sail like white swans down the sewers unpolluted." Although prophet after prophet rebuked his wickedness, he still hardened himself against their warnings. In the very temple which had shielded his helpless infancy, he suffered the priest Zechariah to be stoned to

death beside the altar. This was cited eight hundred years later by our Lord as among the most atrocious acts ever committed by the Jews (Matt. 23:35). But swift and terrible was the retribution. Enemies overcame, riches fled, disease tortured his body and murder put an end to his wicked career.

In Joash were met two strikingly op-

posite lines of ancestry. On the one side he was descended from the good kings, Asa, Jehoshaphat and David, while on the other among his close ancestors were Athaliah, Ahab and Jezebel. Thus met in him, in a marked degree, the conflicting tendencies toward good and evil. It is easy and sad to see which gained the ascendancy.

PELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. Whom did Joash have to train him?
2. What destructive work did the people of the land perform?

3. What would you say as to the divine providence in preserving the childhood of Joash in the temple?

4. What, also, would you say of the Lord's permission to Joash to live after the death of Jehoiada, and to lead Judah into great sin?

5. Name a few helpful passages of Scripture in connection with these questions. Jas. 1:13-17; Rom. 11:33, 34; Rom. 8:28; John 13:7.

6. A very instructive hymn in relation to God's providence is the one by Cowper, beginning:

God moves in a mysterious way
His wonders to perform,
He plants his footsteps on the sea,
And rides upon the storm.

Deep in unfathomable mines
Of never failing skill
He treasures up His bright designs
And works His gracious will.

"He overrules evil, makes even the wrath of man to praise Him, and works all things together for good to them that love God."

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. How long did Joash reign in Judah? 2 Kings 12:1.

2. What was the name of his mother and her early home? 2 Kings 12:2.

3. What effect did Jehoiada the priest have upon Joash? 2 Kings 12:2.

4. What places, however, contrary to law remained? 2 Kings 12:3.

5. What special pious and patriotic service did the king perform? 2 Kings 12:4, 5.

6. Did the work of repair proceed slowly or rapidly and why? 2 Kings 12:6, 7.

7. Whom did the king interrogate as to the lack of progress? 2 Kings 12:7.

8. What change of plan for collections did the king adopt? 2 Kings 12:9.

9. What was the result of the change? 2 Kings 12:10.

10. To whom was the money intrusted and to whom did they pay it? 2 Kings 12:11, 12.

11. What fine tribute is paid to them who disbursed the money? 2 Kings 12:15.

12. What weak and inexcusable surrender did Joash make to Hazael? 2 Kings 12:17, 18.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. The great evil which Joash permitted after the death of Jehoiada looks like apostasy or back-sliding. See 2 Chron. 24:17, 18. He was weak.

2. What especially atrocious evil did he commit? 2 Chron. 24:20-22.

3. Observe that Jehoiada during his life in the flesh could counsel the king,

but after the former's death the counsel could not protect and save him. Not so with our great High Priest, who ever liveth and is ever able to succor. He dwells within the heart as in a temple. He strengtheneth us by his Spirit in the inner man, and willeth and worketh his own good pleasure. If Joash had enjoyed such a High Priest, he had been a better man. Of those to whom much is given, much is expected.

4. Joash had the evils of heredity and environment to overcome. In his personality he was weak. As long as Jehoiada was with him to take the initiative, he did well. When his life-long dependence was gone, he became the tool of wicked men. Beginning well, he ended ill. Possibly Jehoiada might have trained him to be more self-reliant and more godly in practical affairs. Counsel, training and noble endeavor are needful even to old age. Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall. Men now are to put on the whole armor of God, in order to stand secure to the end.

"He that endureth to the end shall be saved."

5. Our Lord warned the people around him against the evil spirit that led king Joash and the people to slaughter Zechariah, "who perished between the altar and the sanctuary." It was the same spirit that later slew Him upon Calvary. It is the same spirit that refuses or neglects his counsel and his grace to-day. The greatest and most fatal sin any one can commit is to refuse to hear, heed and receive Christ as Lord and Saviour.

6. One may be very pious with reference to outward temples, ordinances and forms of religion while denying the power that regenerates and perfects character. "If any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of his." The true temple of God is the human heart or personality. Jesus says, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man will open unto me I will come in and sup with him and he with me." In judging king Joash, let us remember that our light and our privileges are far greater than were his.

Lesson V.

April 30.

GOD'S PITY FOR THE HEATHEN.

(Foreign Missionary Lesson.)

Jonah 3:1—4:11. (Print 3:5—4:11.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Go ye therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Matt. 28:19.

Memory Verses—4, 10, 11. **Suggested Reading**—The Book of Jonah. **Time**—About 830 B. C. **Persons**—Jonah, the king and people of Nineveh. **Place**—Nineveh.

DAILY READINGS.

April 24... M—Jonah 1:1-16—Jonah Thrown Overboard.

April 25.... T—Jonah 2:1-10—Jonah's Prayer.

April 26... W—Jonah 3:1-10—The Repentance of Nineveh.

April 27... T—Jonah 4:1-11—Why God Spared Nineveh.

April 28.... F—Matt. 12:38-45—The Men of Nineveh Shall Stand up in Judgment.

April 29.... S—Ps. 93:1-13—Say Among the Nations the Lord Reigneth.

April 30.... S—Matt. 28:1-20—The Great Commission.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Nineveh: This was the great city of the Assyrian Empire, its metropolis and its royal residence. It was one of several fortresses which were situated in the triangular territory between the Tigris and the upper Zab. It was on the bank of the Tigris, opposite the present Mosul. McCurdy in the Jewish Encyclopedia says: "Nineveh has been diligently excavated by modern explorers. Its site was first definitely fixed by Rich in 1820. The work of exploration on the mound was begun by Layard in 1845, and was then continued by Rassam and George Smith. The city proper, Nineveh, in the strict sense, was oblong in shape, running along the Tigris, and did not occupy more than about three square miles. In the book of Jonah the references to its extent and population apply to the several cities and villages included in the larger area from Khorsabad to Kabah."

"The description of the size of Nineveh remarkably corresponds alike with the ancient accounts and modern investigations. Jonah described it as a 'city of three days' journey.' This obviously means its circumference, for, unless the

city were a circle (as no cities are), it would have no one diameter. A person might describe the average length and breadth of a city, but no one who gave any one measure, by days or miles or any other measure, would mean anything else than its circumference. Diodorus (probably on the authority of Ctesias) states that 'it was well-walled, of unequal lengths. Each of the longer sides was 150 furlongs; each of the shorter, 90. The whole circuit then being 480 furlongs (60 miles), the hope of the founder was not disappointed. For no one afterward built a city of such compass, and with walls so magnificent. To Babylon Clitarchus and the companions of Alexander in their writings assigned a circuit of 365 furlongs, adding that the number of furlongs was conformed to the number of days in the year.' Ctesias, in round numbers, calls them 360; Strabo, 385. All these accounts agree with the statement of Strabo. Nineveh was much larger than Babylon. The sixty miles of Diodorus exactly correspond with the three miles of Jonah. (Pusey.)

There has recently been discovered and placed within the British Museum a fine terra-cotta cylinder of Sennacherib in which that king gives an account of his part in building the palace and city of Nineveh. His city was evidently one of the great fortresses which composed the Nineveh of Jonah. He built eight miles of fortification walls that were seventy feet thick. He built a palace which he

declared had no equal. The time of Sennacherib was more than a century later than that of Jonah, but the king makes it evident that he was only rebuilding a city which already existed. In his cylinder Sennacherib tells why he made choice of this site instead of one of the others in the same region. For fuller information see "The Bible Student and Teacher" for May and June, 1910.

THE BOOK OF JONAH.

This is the fifth of the twelve Minor Prophets. It is the only one that consists entirely of narrative, there being in the book no prophetic discourse. Jonah, the son of Amittai from Gathhepher, prophesied in the reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25). This was about 830 B. C., and so Jonah was earlier in time than any one of the other Minor Prophets by at least a generation. Whether the book also belongs to this earlier date depends upon whether Jonah was himself the author. This is the contention of many scholars, though it should be noted that the book does not claim to have been written by the prophet himself. In the verse in our lesson which speaks of

Nineveh as a great city (3:3) the tense of the verb is past, implying that it no longer existed. In that case the book could not have been written before 607 B. C., at which time Nineveh was destroyed. This book is unique in one other respect. It is the only one of the Minor Prophets which distinctly and solely offers a message to the Gentiles. Two things are contrasted: God's message and mercy for the Gentiles, and the prophet's unwillingness to bear the message or admit the mercy. The purpose of the book, therefore, was to teach the reluctant and exclusive Israelites that God had a purpose for the Gentiles. Hence its appropriateness for a foreign missionary lesson.

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

The book opens with the account of a prophetic message to Jonah commanding him to go to the city of Nineveh and to warn it of impending doom because of wickedness. The prophet was unwilling to be the bearer of a message to a Gentile city, and so went to Joppa, where he embarked in a ship bound for Tarshish to escape "from the presence of the Lord." Tarshish was some region to the west, so Jonah fled in the opposite direction from Nineveh. There follows the familiar story of the storm rising on the sea, the vain effort of the sailors to weather it, and their compliance at length with Jonah's advice to cast him overboard.

The prophet was swallowed by a great fish in which he remained for three days and was then cast up by it on dry land. The second chapter contains a psalm in which the prophet describes his feeling while in the belly of the fish.

At this point our lesson begins. The second time a divine message came to the prophet repeating the former command to go to Nineveh and deliver to it the message. This time the prophet obeyed. There follows a statement as to the size of Nineveh. It was a great city, great even in the eyes of God (see margin). It was a city of three days' journey. This may be taken as referring to either the

5 And the people of Nineveh believed God; and they proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest of them even to the least of them. 6 And the tidings reached the king of Nineveh, and he arose from his throne, and laid his robe from him, and covered him with sackcloth, and sat in ashes. 7 And he made proclamation and published through

Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; let them not feed, nor drink water; 8 but let them be covered with sackcloth, both man and beast, and let them cry mightily unto God: yea, let them turn every one from his evil way, and from the violence that is in his hands. 9 Who knoweth

diameter or the circumference, but since the circumference of the vast complex of forts, towns, villages and gardens which in Gen. 10:12 is called the "great city" was about sixty miles or quite, exactly three days' journey, this and not the diameter is probably intended. Into

this mass of dwellings and men the prophet journeys a day, probably about twenty miles, crying aloud as he went "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." It seems that he preached this one day only, but its effect was to humble Nineveh in ashes of repentance.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 5. Believed God: That is, they believed him to be a true deity and so accepted as true the warning of doom proclaimed by his prophet. Why did Jonah's preaching produce this effect? This was partly due to the prophet himself. The writer does not say the Ninevites had heard of his deliverance and we are probably not warranted in assuming that he meant that this was what impressed them. But his voice and action were those of a prophetic man, and this would make its impression on the Ninevites. It was also partly due to the character of the people whom he addressed. They were superstitious and easily swayed. Layard says: "I have known a Christian priest to frighten a whole Musselman town to tents and repentance by publicly proclaiming that he had received a divine mission to announce a coming earthquake or plague." They were easily but not profoundly impressed. We have no evidence that this repentance produced any permanent reformation of life. **Proclaimed a fast and put on sackcloth:** This was natural for these people and a natural way to

express their feelings. As Jonah passed from district to district of the city the impression he created produced at once a demand for a penitential fast. This spread till it reached even the highest authority, the king. **Sackcloth:** Coarse black haircloth.

6. The king of Nineveh: His name is not mentioned because the purpose of the book is to teach a lesson and not to give us the history.

7. He made proclamation and published: Literally and more easily, "He cried and said," etc. **The decree of the king and his nobles:** This shows the king was not an absolute monarch. Darius sealed the lions' den with his own and the seal of his nobles. (Dan. 6:17.) **Let neither man nor beast, etc.:** The beasts are made to share in the national penitence, for in the Orient they are made to share in sorrow by being dressed in mourning garb. Many ancient writers speak of this.

8. Violence that is in his hands: This was the characteristic sin of the Ninevites. Cf. Nahum 3:1.

9. The prophet's message had con-

whether God will not turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger that we perish not? 10 And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil which he said he would do unto them; and he did it not.

1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he was angry. 2 And he prayed unto Jehovah, and said, I pray thee, O Jehovah, was not this my saying, when I was yet in my country? Therefore I hasted to flee unto Tarshish; for I

knew that thou art a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness, and repentest thee of the evil. 3 Therefore now, O Jehovah, take, I beseech thee, my life from me; for it is better for me to die than to live. 4 And Jehovah said, Doest thou well to be angry? 5 Then Jonah went out of the city, and sat on the east side of the city, and there made him a booth, and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city.

6 And Jehovah God prepared a gourd,

tained no hope of pardon. It was solely a message of doom; the prophet hoped, but the Ninevites thought that no God would give warning of doom for any other reason than to give people an opportunity to avert it. In this they judged more wisely than Jonah.

10. God repented: Better, "God-relented." He did it not: This is always the principle upon which God acts, whether it is expressly stated or not. "At what instant I shall speak concerning a nation . . . to pluck up and to break down and destroy it; if that nation concerning which I have spoken turn from their evil, I will repent of the evil that I thought to do unto them." (Jer. 18:7, 8.)

1. It displeased Jonah: What was it which displeased the prophet? Was it because his own word was not fulfilled? According to the divine test of a prophet (Deut. 18:21, 22) this would throw suspicion upon the truth of his prophetic message. But this was not the reason for his anger. He had the conviction that the Gentiles should be destroyed and he feels that God's mercy and forbearance are hostility to Israel.

2. He prayed: He did not doubt God, nor that his message was really from God. I pray thee: To express deprecation and deference, for the prophet is going to find fault with God. Was not this my saying? Namely, "I knew thee

to be a gracious God," etc. Thou art a gracious God: These identical words are to be found in Ex. 34:6 and in Joel 2:13. This is the way God described himself and he impressed repeatedly upon Israel that this was his disposition. It is against this that Jonah protests. A God who toward the Gentiles was fierce and destructive would be more to his liking.

3. He could not bear to see the love and kindness which had been promised to Israel shared with a heathen nation that would oppress her. He preferred death to this.

4. The margin, "Art thou very angry?" is better, for it is more suited to the context, and the prophet's answer in verse 9 shows that he so understood it. He was "very angry, even unto death." We must understand a mild sarcasm and playfulness in God's questioning. It is as though a father spoke to an angry child, but like a child the prophet is sullen and will not speak.

5. East side of the city: The opposite side from the river Tigris. Booth: Probably of the branches and leaves of trees.

6. Gourd: The margin explains that it was a *Palma Christi*, the castor oil plant. This is now generally admitted by commentators as the plant which shaded Jonah's hut. It grows abundantly in the

and made it to come up over Jonah, that it might be a shade over his head, to deliver him from his evil case. So Jonah was exceeding glad because of the gourd. 7 But God prepared a worm when the morning rose the next day, and it smote the gourd, that it withered. 8 And it came to pass, when the sun arose, that God prepared a sultry east wind; and the sun beat upon the head of Jonah, that he fainted, and requested for himself that he might die, and said, It is better for me to die than to live. 9 And

God said to Jonah, Doest thou well to be angry for the gourd? And he said, I do well to be angry, even unto death. 10 And Jehovah said, Thou hast had regard for the gourd, for which thou hast not labored, neither madest it grow; which came up in a night, and perished in a night: 11 and should not I have regard for Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that can not discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle?

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Tigris valley, attains considerable height, casts a dense shade, and is subject to destruction by the caterpillar.

7. Worm: Caterpillar, probably. Morning: The shade was needed in mid-day, but it was destroyed just before that time came.

8. A sultry east wind: This, coming over the desert, would be indescribably hot. A traveler describes it as "hot, stormy and singularly relaxing and dispiriting." (Rich.) He fainted: Grew faint, as he naturally would under the influences of the sun and east wind.

9. As in verse 4 the question of God is, "Are you very angry?" The prophet

answers, "I am very angry, even unto death."

10-11. These verses contain the main thought of the book. All the rest lead up to this. Jonah's own nature and feeling instinctively approve of God's course. Jonah pities the gourd. How much more should God pity the great city with its many little children and its dumb animals!

11. That cannot discern between their right hand, etc.: This unquestionably refers to little children. Various ages have been assigned as the limit, but most agree on the seventh year. This would make the population of Nineveh about 600,000, which is not too large.

COMMENTS.

The Three Pictures. The lesson develops three pictures, and all are of mental states. The first one gives the effect of Jonah's preaching upon the city of Nineveh. It repented and humbled itself. The second is of the prophet's own attitude. He was the unwilling preacher of what was to him a distasteful message. When at length he does deliver the message under constraint, his sole prospect for consolation is in the hope that his word of doom will be literally and completely fulfilled. He, like others of his nation, nursed in his bosom

hatred and vindictiveness against the Gentiles. Israel was oppressed and mistreated by the Gentiles. It had no law which taught it to love and pray for its oppressors. It construed the law which it did have to permit, yea, to even command hatred and vengeance against its foes. The Jew found in his law that which made hatred of enemy as obligatory as love of neighbor (Matt. 5:43). He thought that it would commend him to the favor of Jehovah if he could confess a feeling of perfect hatred towards his foes (Ps. 139:21, 22). Jonah was a

true son of Israel, and Nineveh, the great, cruel city, which for so long a time was permitted to oppress the people of Israel, was the object of his and of their most vindictive hatred. Jehovah, who was the God of Israel, ought to share in this feeling. This is what his Jewish feeling leads him to desire, but he knows all of the time that it is not the way God feels about it. This brings us to the third part of the lesson. It is God's view; he is a gracious God, and merciful, slow to anger, and abundant in lovingkindness. This was his disposition toward the Gentiles as well as Israel. In all the ages he had so impressed himself upon those who had sought knowledge of him. Between God's feeling towards Nineveh and that of the prophet and his nation, there is, therefore, an irreconcilable conflict. The book of Jonah sets these two views in contrast, and then God vindicates himself before his jealous servant.

God's Argument with the Prophet. (vs. 10, 11.) The Lord must meet man upon his own level. His argument must be intelligible to man and it is better still that it be taken out of man's own experience. This is the nature of the argument by means of which God seeks to convince the prophet. He teaches the prophet to infer who God is and how God feels from the way in which he himself feels. This is exactly the nature of the argument which Jesus uses to teach his disciples the nature and feelings of God. He is the Father. An earthly father loves and shows tenderness. So does God. Jonah has, first of all, the feeling of comfort as he rests under his shaded booth. For this he is grateful, and he feels an attachment for the shrub that protects him. When it perishes, he experiences the feeling of loss, of pity for the withered plant and resentment towards the enemy that destroyed it. Any plant is of small value compared with a human being, much less compared with a great city. If the castor oil plant was of value in Jonah's eyes, how much more must the great city

of Nineveh be precious in the eyes of the Lord! Furthermore, it is implied that on this city he had expended labor. He had brought it to a great size. It was crowded with objects that should appeal to human pity; how much more, then, to divine compassion. Within it are thousands upon thousands of little children who are innocent and ignorant, and "much cattle." We may well compare this argument with the argument of the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost boy which Jesus made to fault-finding Pharisees (Luke 15).

Our Attitude Toward the Heathen: In this story God vindicates himself to a prophet who disapproved of his course. The aim of this little book was to convince that God had a right to show mercy to Gentiles and was not violating his own righteousness when he did so. No one in this day questions the correctness of this conclusion. We should scarcely call him God who did not do this. Jesus teaches a lesson which needs to be added to the one which the book of Jonah enforces. It is that the divine attitude is a model for men. We should not merely approve of God's attitude, but we should imitate it. As God feels we should feel, and what God does we should do. What, then, should be our attitude toward China, India, Africa, and other lands which, like Nineveh, know not God? God's attitude should teach us. The great work of missions, then, is based upon the love and compassion of God.

Its Application to Later Times. "Jonah, in that he built him a tabernacle and sat over against Nineveh, awaiting what should happen to it, wore a different, foreshadowing character. For he prefigured the carnal people of Israel. For these, too, were sad at the salvation of the Ninevites, *i. e.*, the redemption and deliverance of the Gentiles. Whence Christ came to call, not the righteous but sinners to repentance. But the overshadowing gourd over his head was the promises of the Old Testament or those of-

fices in which, as the apostle says, there was a shadow of good things to come, protecting them in the land of promise from temporal evils—all which are now emptied and faded. And now that people, having lost the temple at Jerusalem and the priesthood and sacrifices (all which was a shadow of that which was to come) in its captive dispersion, is scorched by a vehement heat of tribulation, as Jonah by the heat of the sun, and grieves greatly; and yet the salvation of the heathen and the penitent is accounted of more moment than its grief, and the shadow which it loved." (Augustine.)

Value of the Book. "It is, however, when we pass from the form to the substance of the book that we perceive the full justification of its reception among

the prophets. The truth which we find in the Book of Jonah is as full and fresh a revelation of God's will as prophecy anywhere achieves. That God has granted to the Gentiles also repentance unto life is nowhere else in the Old Testament so vividly illustrated. It lifts the teaching of the Book of Jonah to equal rank with the second part of Isaiah, and nearest of all our Twelve to the New Testament. The very form in which this truth is insinuated into the prophet's reluctant mind, by contrasting God's pity for the dim population of Nineveh with Jonah's own pity for his perished gourd, suggests the methods of our Lord's teaching, and invests the book with the morning air of that high day which shines upon the most evangelic of his parables." (G. A. Smith.)

THE LESSON STORY.

The Bible has been truly called "A Handbook on Missions." It abounds in missionary men and methods, and no one can read it aright without growing missionary in spirit.

The story of Jonah presents a wonderful lesson on the need and value of foreign missions. More than eight hundred years before the coming of Christ, "God's pity for the heathen" was shown in sending this prophet to warn and save the Ninevites. Nothing could have been more unwelcome to Jonah than the call to be a missionary to Nineveh. He saw in it an evident token of Jehovah's mercy, and being full of prejudice and bigotry, could not bear the thought of bringing blessing to this heathen city. And yet the command was so urgent that to escape from it meant nothing less than "to escape from the presence of the Lord." He determines, therefore, to immediately set sail from Joppa in a ship bound for Tarshish. Unlike the Psalmist, the prophet failed to realize that though he should "take the wings of the morning," and "dwell in the uttermost parts of the

sea," yet even here the hand of Jehovah should "lead" and "his right hand hold" him. Soon after embarking a terrible storm arose; yet the prophet had fallen into a slumber so deep that not even the raging tempest nor the cries of the seamen awoke him. After praying in vain to their gods for deliverance, the heathen sailor, aroused Jonah, and told him to call upon his God, lest they perish. Then followed the casting of lots, that they might know who was the guilty one. The lot having fallen upon Jonah, they question him regarding his occupation, his country and his people, and are told that he is a Hebrew, and that he fears "the God of heaven, who made the sea and the land." Perplexed, yet still more terrified, they question what must be done, for the sea was growing "more and more tempestuous against them." Jonah bravely tells them to cast him forth into the waves, for in no other way could they be made calm. The generous sailors strive to avert this calamity by rowing hard to get back to the land, but in vain; so, with a prayer to Jehovah for forgiveness,

they cast Jonah into the sea, and immediately "it ceased from its raging." The miraculous events which followed have been regarded by many critics as mere fiction, but the explicit words of Jesus, as recorded in Matt. 12:39, 40, warrant us in fully accepting them as true. Thrown into the sea and swallowed by a great fish, Jonah, after three days and three nights, was cast forth upon the land. Having been released from this "strange and awful imprisonment," the prophet was again commanded to warn the Ninevites of their impending doom, and this time obeyed. On reaching the "exceeding great" and wicked city, he cried in words of solemn warning: "Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be destroyed!" His cry, although "sustained by no evidence," upheld by no argument and confirmed by no miracle, swept over the city with resistless might, and shook it to the very foundations. It reached even the king on his throne, and caused him and all his court to bow down in dust and ashes. Soon the whole city was clothed in sackcloth and sending up a mighty cry to heaven for mercy. His message delivered, Jonah left Nineveh, and making a booth on the east side, not far away, sat under it and waited to see what would become of the city. A rapid growing "gourd," with broad leaves, spread over the prophet's abode, and protected him from the sun's scorching rays. In this leafy bower he found it not unpleasant to await the falling of Jehovah's vengeance on the city. From his subsequent conduct we are not to suppose that he spent sleepless nights on account of its threatened destruction, for when at last

the forty days and forty-first were ended with no visible sign of Jehovah's wrath and all Ninevah was filled with gladness then Jonah was "very angry" and told the Lord "in a strain of mortified pride and disappointed hate," which the writer strangely calls "a prayer," that he had thought all along he would be merciful to these heathen people, and for that very reason he had rebelled against warning them; but now that he had done so, telling them plainly that "in forty days" they should be "destroyed," and still they had been spared. It was more than Israel's prophet could endure, and he longed and begged to die!

Jonah had been happier to see Nineveh perish than to see his prophecy unfulfilled. Hardly more wonderful seemed the mercy of the Lord toward wicked Nineveh than his patience toward this narrow, selfish prophet. He does not even rebuke him, but only leaves him with the gentle query: "Doe'st thou wish to be angry?" On waking the next morning Jonah is distressed beyond measure to find his leafy bower a withered, and under the sun's terrible heat again walls out his bitter longing that he may die. The Lord then makes use of the withered vine to rebuke the prophet's selfishness and bigotry. He has been sorely grieved over the death of his "gourd," which grew up in a night and perished in a night, and should not Jehovah spare Nineveh with its multitudes perishing in heathen darkness? What answer Jonah made to this rebuke is not recorded, but let us hope that profiting by it, he returned from Nineveh with a broader vision, higher aims and deeper sympathy.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. How many calls came to Jonah to go to Nineveh? Jonah 1:1 and Jonah 3:1.

2. To where did he start instead of to Nineveh? Jonah 1:3

3. What happened to the ship in which he journeyed? Jonah 1:4.

4. What expedients did the sailors use to save the ship? 1:5.

5. What did the shipmaster request of the prophet? 1:6.

6. What method did the sailors use to find the cause of their trouble? 1:7.

7. What conversation followed the casting of lots? 1:8-12.

8. What request did the prophet make? 1:12.

9. What two things did they do before they granted his request? 1:13-14.

10. What two things did they do after granting it? 1:16.

11. What merciful providence did the Lord use to save Jonah's life? 1:17.

12. What was the result of Jonah's experience upon his obedience? 2:7-9.

QUESTIONS UPON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. How did Jonah receive and obey the second call? 3:1-3.

2. What was the specific call? 3:2-4.

3. What is said as to the size of the city? 3:3.

4. How far did Jonah enter into the city? 3:4.

5. What was the particular message delivered? 3:4.

6. In what spirit was the message received? 3:5.

7. What effect did it have upon the king? 3:6-9.

8. What was his proclamation to the Ninevites? 3:7-9.

9. What was his expression of hope for mercy? 3:9.

10. What was the result with reference to the Lord? 3:10.

11. What was the effect upon Jonah of God's mercy to Nineveh? 4:1.

12. What did Jonah say he knew of God's character? 4:2.

13. For what at this time did Jonah pray? 4:3.

14. Tell the method of appeal which the Lord then used. 4:6, 10-11.

15. What also did God prepare for the gourd? 4:7.

16. What is the beautiful lesson here concerning God? 4:10-11.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. Jesus uses Jonah's experience in the fish as typical of his burial. As Jonah was three days and three nights in the belly of the sea monster, so should the Son of man be three days and three nights in the heart of the earth (Matt. 12:40). Christ here gives his personal sanction to this miracle. The deliverance of Jonah was a parable of Jesus' resurrection. Jonah himself was a sign unto the Ninevites. So shall the Son of man be a sign unto his generation by his resurrection from the dead. The early preaching of the apostles was a mighty testimony of the resurrection of Christ.

2. "The men of Nineveh shall rise in judgment with this generation, and shall condemn it; because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and, behold, a greater than Jonah is here" (Matt. 12:41).

There is more in Christ to produce repentance than in the preaching of Jonah. In him the goodness of God leads men to repentance. If those to whom Jesus was then speaking were held the more responsible because of the greater light they enjoyed, how very responsible must we be because of our wonderful illumination and opportunities? No principle is more clearly stated in the Scriptures than that men shall not all be judged by the same standard. Each shall be judged according to his light and his privileges. My light will not be used as a standard for another, but only for myself. It is accepted according to that a man hath; not according to that a man hath not. People with little opportunity, who use it, are better than men of great opportunity who abuse it. It is well to remember

this principle in forming an estimate of others and their acceptance with God.

3. How very different was Jonah's message from the glorious gospel of the grace of God which missionaries are bearing to the great heathen cities to-day! What was but dimly seen in Jonah's day—his very gracious and merciful character and his love for even the heathen peoples—shines out brilliantly to-day in the face of Jesus. He died that the world might be saved through the gospel. How slowly did the Lord's true disposition dawn upon even the chosen people!

4. How different the disposition of Jonah, even though a prophet, from that of Jesus or his apostle, Paul, and the Christian church that offered themselves and their treasures willingly in order to win a lost world to salvation! How narrow was Jonah's vision, limited to his own nation and thinking of Jehovah as the God of the Jews only! Peter himself was so narrowed by his Jewish training that even after the resurrection, Pentecost and many experiences in the new dispensation, it was necessary that a miracle should be wrought at Joppa in order that his sympathies and vision should be enlarged to embrace the household of Cornelius at Cæsarea. If the tendency both of Jonah the prophet and Peter the apostle was to narrowness, and the limitation of God's salvation, how about our own natural tendency to regard ourselves as peculiarly God's people and care? What have we but that which we have received? Do we rejoice that inasmuch as we freely received we may freely give? Does not the "Come unto me" only precede the "Go ye into all the world" for me? "Whatsoever he saith

unto thee do it"! What are those personal questions about John to "thee?" "Follow thou me." Where, to-day, are gladder hearts than those that bear the message, not of death, but of life, to the heathen Ninevehs to-day? It was said that they should be willing in the day of God's power, and this is that day. Jonah lacked both the spirit and the message of the gospel.

5. As a severe and quite revolutionary experience was necessary to convert Jonah to heathen missions, so it may be essential to many narrow and selfish souls to-day. He learned one sublime lesson from his oppressive affliction. It is found in the last four words of his psalm: "Salvation is of Jehovah." "It is not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit, saith the Lord." The brethren in Jerusalem had to be swallowed up with persecution before they became the outgoing heralds of the cross. It is they who know not only affliction, but the power of the resurrection out of sin, who are fitted as the Lord's evangelists.

6. Notice, finally, how very willing the great heathen masses in Nineveh were to receive and heed the message. Few words are necessary. They became in turn preachers among themselves. Jonah did not spend a year preaching repentance. His brief, simple message was quickly obeyed. It was one of doom. But somehow the king saw some hope, and himself turned preacher. Jonah got only half way through the city, and others taking up his words published them to every soul. Missionaries testify of the great eagerness of the heathen to hear the gospel.

Lesson VI.

May 7.

UZZIAH, KING OF JUDAH, HUMBLLED.

2 Chron. 26. (Print vs. 8-21.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Prov. 16:18.

Memory Verses—19, 20. **Suggested Reading**—2 Chron. 26-28. **Time**—From 806 to 755 B. C. **Persons**—Uzziah, Azariah the priest scribe, officers and other priests. **Places**—Judah, Jerusalem and the wilderness.

DAILY READINGS.

May 1..... M—2 Chron. 26:1-15; 2 Kings 14:21, 22—Uzziah's Name Spread Abroad.
 May 2..... T—2 Chron. 26:16-23—Humbled by Becoming a Leper.
 May 3..... W—Dan. 4:1-37—The Pride of Nebuchadnezzar Humbled.
 May 4..... T—Dan. 5:1-31—The Pride of Belshazzar Humbled.
 May 5..... F—2 Chron. 32:1-23—The Pride of Sennacherib Humbled.
 May 6..... S—Acts 12:1-23—The Pride of Herod Humbled.
 May 7..... S—1 Pet. 5:1-11—God Resisteth the Proud, but Giveth Grace to the Humble.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Judah. The territory over which Uzziah ruled was the most extensive that had been under the control of any king of Judah since the disruption. The Philistines, with their rich land, were completely under his sway. The Arabians and the Meunim, tribes living to the south and southeast of Judah, acknowledged his control, and on the east the Ammonites paid tribute. Eloth, on the Gulf of Akabah, the eastern arm of the Red Sea, was rebuilt by him, and thus he was able southward to extend the boundaries of his kingdom to the same limits as that of Solomon. The southern desert or wilderness he controlled by erecting towers, the best means of keeping the nomad tribes in subjection. This was the method followed by the Romans and also the modern Turks. Tiglath-pileser, in his tablets, claims to have taken nineteen districts in northern Syria from Azariah (azriyahn). This indicates a control of territory in the north of which the Bible says nothing.

"In Jerusalem, according to the Chronicler, Uzziah made ample additions to

the walls. *He built towers in Jerusalem over the Gate of the Corner; that is, on the extreme northeast, and over the Gate of the Valley, on the south of the city, and upon the angles or turnings of the walls, and made them strong.* This notice represents a development of the fortifications of Jerusalem which is well within the ascertained achievements of the age in military engineering, and which was probably forced upon the defenders of Jerusalem by their experience of the ease with which the Israelite army had made a long breach in the northern wall. From as early as the fourth millennium, Babylonian engineers built the walls of fortresses with a regular sequence of right angles, out and in, with heavy towers over the gates and at the corners, so that the besieged could command with their bows the foot of the walls and prevent these from being breached by the besiegers. The Syrian and other fortresses attacked by the Assyrians in the ninth and eighth centuries are represented, almost without exception, as polygonal. Very frequently the walls are

double, or even treble, and in general they were furnished with battlements, casemates and loopholes. But the main feature is the tower projecting from the wall and manned by archers, who shoot over its breastwork at the advancing foe. Of the results of this long-developed science, Uzziah's engineers are said to have employed the gate towers and the flanking towers at the angle where the walls turned round the city or bent with the natural line of rock. Probably this was

all that was required on the walls of Jerusalem, which for the most part were planted on the edge of deep ravines, high above the reach of breaching engines. . . . Uzziah's flanking towers fully served their purpose. Where before his reign the comparatively small forces of Northern Israel had made a long breach on the northern wall, the only breachable part of the defences, after his reign the engines of Assyria herself failed to effect an entrance." (G. A. Smith.)

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

The last king of Judah, whose life and reign formed the basis for one of our lessons, was Joash (April 16 and 23). His reign was distinguished principally for the restoration of the temple and its service. Politically, his kingdom suffered at the hands of Hazael, the king of Damascus, though the payment of tribute prevented an actual invasion of the land (2 Kings 12:17, 18). He was put to death by conspirators for some unknown fault, which seems to have been laid to his blame personally, and not to the house of David, for his son, Amaziah, succeeded him. His first act was to put to death the murderers of his father, but in doing this he exercised a clemency which was then unusual at least. The children of the murderers were spared (2 Kings 14:5, 6). Amaziah was a vigorous ruler. He prosecuted a successful war against the Edomites and captured from them a

rocky fortress called Sela (v. 7). This victory opened the way to the Red Sea, and his successor took advantage of it by reopening the port of Elath, that had been in Judah's possession and lost in the time of Jehoshaphat (1 Kings 22:48). Elated by this victory, he next foolishly challenged Jehoash of Israel. The latter defeated him in the field, and followed up this advantage by an attack on Jerusalem. He broke down four hundred cubits of the city wall and despoiled both the temple and the palace (vs. 8-14). Like his father, Amaziah perished at the hands of conspirators. He fled to Lachish, but was followed there and slain. We are not told what the purpose of his murderers was, but if it was to put one of their number on the throne they were thwarted in this, for "All the people of Judah took Azariah (Uzziah) and made him king in the room of his father, Amaziah" (2 Kings 14:21).

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

The book of Kings gives a very brief account of the reign of Azariah, but the Chronicler has preserved many incidents which it omits. The entire twenty-sixth chapter is devoted to the account of his reign. After giving the circumstances of his accession in the identical words just quoted (2 Kings 14:4) and after

mentioning his building of Elath (Eloth), the Chronicler tells the duration of his reign, which reached the unparalleled length of fifty-two years. His mother was a native of Jerusalem. His reign was a good one, and it was not marred by idolatry. Mention is made of Zechariah, evidently a counsellor who had a good in-

8. And the Ammonites gave tribute to Uzziah: and his name spread abroad even to the entrance of Egypt; for he waxed exceeding strong. 9 Moreover

Uzziah built towers in Jerusalem at the corner gate, and at the valley gate, and at the turning of the wall, and fortified them. 10 And he built

fluence over Uzziah, but whether he was a prophet or priest is not stated. A brief account is next given of his wars. He successfully breaks the powers of the

Philistines, capturing three of their chief cities, and then he builds others. The Arabians and the Meunim, who lived on his southern border, were also reduced.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 8. Ammonites: They lived northeast of Moab. **Entrance of Egypt:** The point on the coast to the southwest of Judah, where Egyptian territory begins. Uzziah thus ruled from the desert on the east to the sea on the west, and from the desert on the south to the territory of Israel on the north.

9. Towers: These were built over the gates and at the corners so that those within the city might, in case of siege, defend the wall against attack. **Corner gate:** This gate is again mentioned in 2 Chron. 25:23 and 2 Kings 14:13. It and the Ephraim gate were on the northern side of the city, as is evident from these passages. Some authorities suppose it to be the northeast and some the southeast gate. The probabilities favor the latter position. **The valley gate:** From its name it is evident that this gate opened into one of the valleys near Jerusalem. Formerly this was thought to be the western valley, and this gate was supposed to be near the modern Joppa gate. In 1894 Dr. Bliss investigated the ancient wall and unearthed at the southwest corner the sills of an ancient gateway. This overlooks the valley of Hinnom, to the south of the city. Three scholars, working independently, have concluded that this was the Valley gate. They are Prof. Guthe, Prof. Mitchell and Prof. G. A. Smith. **Turning of the wall:** The Septuagint has the plural here, which would then mean the turnings or angles of the wall.

This is more probably correct and would imply a thorough fortification of the city.

10. Towers in the wilderness: See Geographical Notes. **Hewed out cisterns:** "Judah depends largely for its water supply on reservoirs in which the rainfall is stored. These are generally cut in the natural rock and covered at the top, with the exception of a small aperture. Numerous cisterns, apparently of great antiquity, are met with along the ancient lines of travel, and in the vicinity of almost every ancient site. In the desert they would be especially wanted." **In the lowlands also:** This was the Shephelah, the low foothills between the mountain ridge of Judah and the Philistine plain. **In the plain:** The margin has "tableland." The former translation would indicate the Maritime Plain. But cattle are not usually grazed here. It was tillable soil. The reading of the margin would make it mean the uplands to the east of the Jordan. This is more likely correct. Possibly the Ammonites (v. 8) paid their tribute in grazing cattle for Uzziah. Three separate pasture lands are indicated: (1) the wilderness to the east and south; (2) the foothills, and (3) the downs east of the Jordan. **The mountains and the fruitful fields:** This describes Judah proper. Vines flourish here. **The fruitful fields:** The original is Carmel. This is not Mount Carmel, but a fertile district in the southeastern part of Judah. See 1 Sam. 25:2. Carmel was

towers in the wilderness, and hewed out many cisterns, for he had much cattle; in the lowland also, and in the plain: *and he had* husbandmen and vinedressers in the mountains and in the fruitful fields; for he loved husbandry. 11 Moreover Uzziiah had an army of fighting men, that went out to war by bands, according to the number of their reckoning made by Jeiel the scribe and Maaseiah the officer, under the hand of Hananiah, one of the king's captains. 12 The whole number of the heads of fathers' houses, even the mighty men of valor, was two thousand and six hundred. 13 And under their hand was an army, three hundred thousand and seven thousand and five hundred, that made war with mighty power, to help the king against the enemy. 14 And

Uzziiah prepared for them, even for all the host, shields, and spears, and helmets, and coats of mail, and bows, and stones for slinging. 15 And he made in Jerusalem engines, invented by skilful men, to be on the towers and upon the battlements, wherewith to shoot arrows and great stones. And his name spread far abroad; for he was marvellously helped, till he was strong.

16 But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up, so that he did corruptly, and he trespassed against Jehovah his God; for he went into the temple of Jehovah to burn incense upon the altar of incense. 17 And Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him fourscore priests of Jehovah, that were valiant men: 18 and they withstood Uzziiah

a symbol of fertility, and the translators have given the meaning of the word.

11. **Jeiel the scribe, etc.:** He and Maaseiah were subordinates under Hananiah. These three organized the army, divided it into divisions, and kept the lists of soldiers.

12. These 2,600 were the patriarchal chiefs, and from their tribes or clans came the fighting men. They are described as valiant men, mighty men of valor.

13. This gives the number of available fighting men in the kingdom. Note the exactness of the number, 307,500, whereas Amaziah's army is given in round numbers, 300,000 (25:5). This points to the hand of the scribe. This army was under the patriarchal chiefs.

14. Uzziiah completely rearmed his host. Different sorts of weapons were provided for different classes of soldiers. The equipment seems to have been complete, even to the providing of stones for the slingers.

15. This is the only mention of shooting instruments of this king in the Bible. They next appear in Jewish history in the time of the Maccabees (1 Mac. 6:51).

Uzziiah had two kinds, (1) what the Romans afterwards called catapults, for the throwing of arrows, and (2) *balesta*, to throw stones. These were placed on the walls and helped the besieged repel attacks.

16. His heart was lifted up: He became proud and this led him to wickedness. **He went into the temple:** No one but the priests were allowed to enter the temple building. This was, therefore, an invasion of the rights of the priesthood. Neighboring sovereigns were priests as well as sovereign, and Uzziiah evidently was imitating them.

17. **Azariah:** In verse 20 he is called the chief priest. This probably means that he was the high priest at this time, though his name is not mentioned in the list of high priests given in 1 Chron. 6: 4-15. **Four score priests:** The intention evidently was to use force on the king. So many priests and their description as valiant men, suggests that the king was probably surrounded by a considerable company.

18, 19. This scene took place in the holy place of the temple, for the altar of

the king, and said unto him, It pertaineth not unto thee, Uzziah, to burn incense unto Jehovah, but to the priests the sons of Aaron, that are consecrated to burn incense: go out of the sanctuary; for thou hast trespassed; neither shall it be for thine honor from Jehovah God. 19 Then Uzziah was wroth; and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense; and while he was wroth with the priests, the leprosy brake forth in his forehead before the priests in the house of Jehovah, beside the altar of incense.

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incense was there. The same punishment was inflicted on him which befell Miriam (Num. 12:10) and Gehazi (2 Kings 5:27).

20. They had a right to put him out now as an unclean person and he made no effort to resist. Death was the penalty pronounced in the new law against the man who invaded the rights of the priesthood (Num. 18:7).

20 And Azariah the chief priest, and all the priests, looked upon him, and, behold, he was leprous in his forehead, and they thrust him out quickly from thence; yea, himself hasted also to go out, because Jehovah had smitten him. 21 And Uzziah the king was a leper unto the day of his death, and dwelt in a separate house, being a leper; for he was cut off from the house of Jehovah: and Jotham his son was over the king's house, judging the people of the land.

21. Unto the day of his death: We are not told how long it was before Uzziah's death that he became a leper. Beecher, in his chronology, makes this period thirteen years, but this is extremely doubtful. **Separate house:** The leper was not permitted to dwell in a house with others (Lev. 13:46). **Jotham:** He became regent and directed the affairs of the kingdom.

COMMENTS.

The Condition of the Kingdom. Viewed from the political condition of the kingdom, the period within which our lesson falls was the most prosperous one for Judah from the disruption till the destruction of Jerusalem. The kings were able to subdue and control the petty neighboring kingdoms. With the exception of the foolish war between Jehoash of Israel and Amaziah of Judah there was peace between the two sister kingdoms. This was just before the awful storm of Assyrian invasion broke upon the land. All outward circumstances combined to make it a favorable time for the political and commercial life of the nation. Add to this the fact that the kings of this period were vigorous and efficient and we are not surprised that the nation prospered.

The Peril of the Age. Prosperity is, however, always attended with peril to the moral and religious life of a people. Commercial success has its danger, and this peculiar danger was present during the reign of Uzziah. It was at just about this time that the earliest of the prophets who have left us their sermons preached in Israel, and their books abound in references to the sins of wealth and greed which were sapping the spiritual strength of the chosen people. At this time the chief energy of the people was devoted to money-getting and their attention was turned to this, "not so much, as had formerly been the case, in particular provinces and districts, but throughout the country, even in Judah, and not so much because a single king like Solomon favored commercial under-

takings, as because the love of trade and gain, and the desire for the easy enjoyment of the greatest possible amount of wealth, had taken possession of all classes. All the scorn poured out by the prophets upon this haste to be rich, and all their rebukes of the tendency to cheat, which was one of the fruits of it, no longer availed to restore the ancient simplicity and contentment (Hos. 12:8; Isa. 2:7). The long and fortunate reign of Uzziah in Judah was very favorable to the growth of this love of gain and enjoyment. The quick interchange of money in the lower classes, and the fierce struggle for gain which gradually absorbed the entire people, stimulated the upper classes to similar attempts. Many were the complaints in Judah of the injustice of the judges, and of the oppression of the helpless (Amos 3:1; 6:1; Hos. 5:10; cf. also Ps. 12). There was a perverse and mocking disposition prevalent which led men to throw doubt upon everything and to raise objections to everything (Amos 6:3; 9:10; Hos. 4:4). It made them treat with harsh contempt the rebukes and exhortations of the best prophets, as we feel distinctly from the whole tone of the writings of Amos, Hosea and Isaiah. It led them to desire to know heathen religions and to introduce foreign divinities, even when the king himself held aloof from any such movement (Amos 2:4; Hos. 4:15; 6:11; 12:1; Isaiah 2:8). It became more and more difficult to restrain these tendencies." (Ewald.)

A Ruined Reign. "Many a reign, indeed, was a spoiled reign which had begun well, promised well, and continued well for some length of time. But the reign of Uzziah, of all the reigns of Judah and of Israel, was the longest, with one exception—that of Manasseh—and particularly full of prosperity and remarkably varied prosperity within, of success in just foreign wars, and of that which led to these things, viz., the most gracious

tokens of the divine approval and help, was all to be wrecked in an hour, apparently, so far as king Uzziah was concerned. His 'people, indeed, were not stricken for his sin. Nor were his priests, whose loyal fidelity to their high office and sacred charge and whose faithful courage shone out to great advantage, but for the king himself, whenever his defection occurred, all the harvest of many years of a well-spent and hitherto glorious reign was 'blown quite away' by—surely only such it could have been—'one cunning bosom sin!'" (Barker.)

A Painful Spectacle. "In Uzziah, the leper, we have one who occupied the highest place in the kingdom brought to an estate which the meanest subject in the realm, who had the hue of health in his cheeks, would not have accepted in place of his own. We have one in whose presence it was once an honor to stand, and whose face it was a high privilege to behold, reduced to such a condition that it was a kindness for any one to be with him, a pain for any eye to regard him, a sacrifice and defilement for any one to touch him; we have a man whose presence once brought highest honor to the home the threshold of which he might condescend to cross, now brought so low that no humblest householder in the land could or would permit him to pass his door; we have a man who did stand foremost in every religious privilege, debarred from entering the outer court of the sanctuary; we have one who had spent his manly energies in all forms of happy and useful activity, shut up in a separate house and secluded from affairs; we have an instance of complete humiliation, and we can not fail to be affected by it, if we dwell upon all that it meant to the unhappy subject of it." (Clarkson.)

From what we have learned above, however, the sin of Uzziah was in keeping with the sins of his time and people. It had its root in arrogance and lust for personal advantage. This in his subjects

was manifested in search for wealth, but in the king in the effort to grasp personal advantage. He paid the penalty for his own sin and is but a type of his

people, and his sufferings are prophetic of the fate of Judah when God had demonstrated that its heart was too hard for repentance.

THE LESSON STORY.

The reign of Uzziah, king of Judah, was exceptionally glorious, but it ended in terrible disaster. Chosen by the people at the age of sixteen to succeed his murdered father, Amaziah, he reigned for more than half a century, and in all that time the Southern Kingdom enjoyed greater prosperity than it had known since the death of Solomon. His name, meaning "my strength is Jehovah," suggests the secret of his marvelous prosperity, for, according to the record, "as long as he sought Jehovah" he was made "to prosper." The chief effort of Uzziah in the early part of his reign was to bring into subjection all the enemies of Judah. He subdued the Edomites, who had revolted from the house of David in Jero-boam's reign, eight years before, and then proceeded to recover and make strong the port of Elath, on the Red Sea, in order to insure the safety of his commerce. After this he waged successful wars against the Philistines and the Arabs, capturing the strong cities of the former and putting a stop to the plundering incursions of the latter. He finally compelled the Ammonites to pay tribute. After all these achievements it is said that "his name spread abroad, even to the entrance of Egypt." Having subdued all enemies, the king turned his attention to the building up and strengthening of his kingdom. He built numerous towers and fortified the walls in Jerusalem, established there a great standing army of 307,500 men, equipped them with armor, and trained them in the use of engines of war. Best of all, it is said of Uzziah that he "set himself to seek God." He seems to have been faithful, at this pe-

riod, to Jehovah, and to have been greatly influenced for good by the prophet Zechariah, who is mentioned in connection with him (2 Chron. 26:5).

Thus far we have considered only the bright side of his reign. How sad that one so great and good should have ended his days in overwhelming misfortune. Elated over his achievements, he attempted to burn incense in the temple where only the priests were allowed to go. Had he obeyed and not stubbornly resisted the high priest, Azariah, and eighty of his colleagues, who came in to protest against his sacrilegious act, Uzziah might have passed out of the temple forgiven and unharmed, but being opposed, he added to the deadly sins of disobedience and profanity, the sin of anger, and, as he stood in the holy place, burning with unholy passion, "suddenly the spot of leprosy rose and burned upon his forehead." The priests, gazing with horror upon the stricken king, sought to thrust him out quickly, and Uzziah, no longer resisting them, rushed from the temple, never to enter it again, but from henceforth to drag out his days in the living death of leprosy. Cut off from the house of Jehovah, shut up in "a leper house," outside the walls of Jerusalem, bereft of his kingdom and of every earthly advantage, his son, reigning in his stead, Uzziah ended his wretched life at the age of sixty-eight, and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David. The chronicler adds that he was denied burial in the actual sepulchre of his fathers, but buried in a field nearby, which belonged to them, "for they said, he is a leper."

Thus the glory of Uzziah "faded into dust and darkness." He who once had set himself to seek God and been "marvelously helped" of him fell at last into the deepest abyss of calamity. The life

of Uzziah, with its strong and prosperous beginning and its ignominious ending, gives startling emphasis to the apostle's warning: "Let him who thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. To what heathen city was Jonah commanded of God to go and with what message?

2. What indicated the prophet's great unwillingness to obey?

3. What was the disposition of the heathen sailors toward Jonah?

4. What was the immediate effect of casting Jonah overboard?

5. What did Jesus say with reference to Jonah as a sign? Matt. 12:38-40.

6. What did Jesus teach with reference to the light and opportunity of the Ninevites, in contrast with those who saw and heard Jesus? Matt. 12:41.

7. The great principle, that according to one's light is also his responsibility,

makes the condition of those who have the gospel and obey it not worse than the condition of those who have not the gospel, but walk in the little light they possess. Great is our responsibility in the light of Christ.

8. When Jonah received his second call to go and preach to Nineveh, did he obey it, and what was the result?

9. Did he, after his dreadful experience, become a cheerful and eager missionary to Nineveh and did he seem to sympathize with God in his desire to save the city?

10. What principle may we derive from this narrative as to God's great willingness and of Jonah's unwillingness to save the heathen?

QUESTIONS UPON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. By what other name was king Uzziah called? 2 Chron. 26:1.

2. What was the name of his father and grandfather? 2 Chron. 26:1; 2 Kings 14:1.

3. What people made Uzziah their king? 2 Chronicles 26:1.

4. How old was he when he began to reign and how long did he continue to reign? 2 Chron. 26:3.

5. What is said of his conduct as king, and of his father in the same connection? 2 Chron. 26:4.

6. What particular thing did he start out to accomplish? 2 Chron. 26:5.

7. What may one infer from the reference to Zechariah? 2 Chron. 26:5.

8. What was the result of seeking Jehovah? 2 Chron. 26:5.

9. Against what people did the Lord help the king to war? 2 Chron. 26:6.

10. What three walls did he break down? 2 Chron. 26:6.

11. Where did he build cities? 2 Chron. 26:6.

12. How did the glory of his reign compare with that of the reign of his predecessors? 2 Chron. 26:8.

13. In what two places did he build towers? 2 Chron. 26:9-10.

14. What is said of his cattle, his husbandry, his cisterns? 2 Chron. 26:10.

15. What is said of his army? 2 Chron. 26:11-13.

16. What is said of the equipment of the soldiers? 2 Chron. 26:14.

17. What kind of war engines had the king in Jerusalem? 2 Chron. 26:15.

18. What besetting and fatal sin led to his humiliation? 2 Chron. 26:16.

19. What profane and disastrous act did he perform? 2 Chron. 26:16.

20. Who reproved him, why, and with what result? 2 Chron. 26:17-20.

21. What is said of him and of the end of his reign? 2 Chron. 26:20-21.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. Here is another reign that began well, but ended ill. The principles of righteousness were not in the king's character sufficiently fundamental. Like the house that fell, his character was not built upon the rock.

2. It would not be fair to judge Uzziah according to the glorious light of the gospel. But even in the light he enjoyed, he was condemned of God.

3. The growth of pride that finally overthrew him must have been at first subtle and then long-continued. It could not have sprung up in a day. Pride is a very respectable sin and men, like the Pharisee in the parable, boast that they are better than others. Nebuchadnezzar

and Belshazzar were both injured by pride. Jesus places very great emphasis upon the necessity of humility. God is said to resist the proud and to give grace to the humble. To think of one's self above that he ought to think, to think of himself as something when, truly, he is nothing, is to blunder and fall. No one has any thing in or of himself of which he should boast. Every good gift comes from God. We have nothing except that which we have received. Pride blinds one's eyes. It gives credit to the wrong source. It shuts out providence and faith.

4. Profanation, stubborn anger and disobedience followed. Then the leprosy, loathsome, degrading and as a signal mark of the divine displeasure.

Lesson VII.

May 14.

ISAIAH'S VISION AND CALL TO SERVICE.

(Home Missionary Lesson.)

Isaiah 6:1-13.

GOLDEN TEXT—I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. Isa. 6:8.

Memory Verses—6:8. **Suggested Readings**—Isaiah 2-4. **Time**—755 B. C. **Persons**—The Lord, Isaiah, the Seraphim. **Place**—Jerusalem.

DAILY READINGS.

May 8....M—Isaiah 6:1-13—Isaiah's Vision and Call to Service.

May 9....T—Isaiah 2:1-4—Isaiah's Vision of the Attractiveness of the Lord's House.

May 10...W—Isaiah 2:5-22—Vision of the Vanity of Idols.

May 11...T—Isaiah 3:1-15—The Lord Entering into Judgment with the Rulers.

May 12...F—Isaiah 3:16-26; 4:1—Judgment of Careless Women.

May 13...S—Isaiah 4:2-6—The Redeemed Jerusalem.

May 14...S—Isaiah 1:1-20—Come, let us reason together, saith the Lord.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

In our last lesson we were told of the mournful fate which befell King Uzziah. For some unknown length of time he lingered, living in a separate house, but at length death removed him. There was in Jerusalem at this time a young man, not previously mentioned, who was destined to have a greater share in poli-

tics of Judah and to wield a greater influence than any man then living. His name was Isaiah. He was profoundly impressed by the brilliant career and sad end of Uzziah, and out of his meditation over these came his call to be a prophet. This was the beginning of a long and useful career. He was the adviser and companion of kings.

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

"It is now universally acknowledged that this chapter records Isaiah's initiation into the office of a prophet. The opinion of many older commentators that it represents a renewal or recovery of the prophetic consciousness after several years of public activity was based on the erroneous assumption that the order of the book is in the main chronological, and that the previous chapters contain prophecies from the reign of Uzziah. Everything in the narrative itself suggests that it is an inaugural vision, a record of the experience by which Isaiah was made a prophet. The conscious-

ness of standing in a peculiar relation to God, of personal reconciliation to him, of being in his council, and bearing a definite commission straight from himself, dates from the moment when in an ecstasy he 'saw the Lord.' The vision is undoubtedly an actual experience, not the mere embodiment of an idea; it occurred in the death year of Uzziah, as the prophet, looking back after some lapse of time, distinctly recalls. Then Isaiah saw God, not indeed with his bodily eyes, but in a prophetic trance, in which the ordinary operation of the mind was suspended and realities as-

1 In the year that king Uzziah died saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up; and his train filled the temple. 2 Above him stood the sera-

phim: each one had six wings; with twain he covered his face, and with twain he covered his feet, and with twain he did fly. 3 And one cried unto an-

sumed concrete and visible forms. That the publication of the vision belongs to a more advanced stage of the prophet's ministry seems implied by the note of time (v. 1) and is probable on other grounds. Its place in the book is best explained by the supposition that it was written as the prologue to a short collection of oracles giving a summary of Isaiah's teaching in the early part of the reign of Ahaz. But we have no right to imagine that the prophet, from his subsequent experience, read into his original commission elements which it did not convey to his mind at the time. To suppose that he could not have carried on

his work under the depressing conviction (expressed in vs. 1-13) that he would only harden the people in unbelief is to mistake the prophet's attitude to his work. If there were any force in the argument it would prove too much, for 't would be necessary to suppose that the chapter was written after Isaiah's life work was over. But Isaiah, like his predecessors, Amos and Hosea, and his successors, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, spoke the word of God under an inward constraint, and his writings contain no sign that he ever cherished any conception of success beyond what the vision allows." (Skinner.)

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 1. In the year that king Uzziah died: This was about the year 755 B. C. But this is mentioned evidently for some other reason than merely to date the prophet's call. The death of Uzziah marked the close of the most successful reign that had been in Judah since Solomon. The person of the king was held in reverence and his tragic and melancholy death could not fail to throw a mantle of gloom over the spirits of the young man, Isaiah. Jotham was by no means so vigorous a figure as his father, Uzziah. The political horizon was darkened by ominous clouds. The youthful Isaiah could not fail to be disturbed by anxious questions regarding the future. This created a mental state which was fallow soil for the vision. "The earthly king had passed away and now Isaiah sees the true king in his glory." I saw: It is a little mistake to think that vision is limited to beholding with the physical eye. This is more than a seeing with

the outward eye. Probably there were many in the temple, but to no eye did this vision appear but to that of the prophet. It was for him, and may be said to have transpired within his own soul. It was, however, nevertheless real and an actual experience. It was not merely an idea which filled his mind. **The Lord:** The original word is not Jehovah, but the one which means "Lord" in the sense of sovereign. It is the proper word to apply to one who sat on a throne. **High and lifted up:** This describes the throne and not the Lord. **His train:** The skirts of his robe (see margin). It is hard to say why this is mentioned unless it was because the prophet felt himself to be too unworthy to look upon the person of the Lord.

2. Above: More properly "about." The Hebrew speaks of those who are serving or attending a king as "above" him. **The seraphim:** The word means "fiery beings." They are mentioned no-

other, and said, Holy, holy, holy, is Jehovah of hosts: the whole earth is full of his glory. 4 And the foundations of the thresholds shook at the voice of him that cried, and the house was filled with smoke. 5 Then said I, Woe is me! for

I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips: for mine eyes have seen the King, Jehovah of hosts.

6 Then flew one of the seraphim unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which

where else in the Scriptures as heavenly, angelic beings. The word is applied to the serpents in the wilderness (Num. 21: 6-9). The difference between seraphim and cherubim is not known. These, in the vision of Isaiah, are ministers or servants of Jehovah. **With twain he covered his face:** This is because of the glory and majesty of the Lord. The Jewish rabbis, in their commentary on this passage, said with truth, "With two he covered his face that he might not see; and with two he covered his feet, that he might not be seen."

3. **One cried:** The form of the Hebrew verb means "one kept crying." **Holy:** While it means many other things, the word "holy" denotes primarily separation, removed at a distance, exaltation. It denotes the Lord's infinite superiority to man. While the Lord is morally perfect, the word holy, in the Old Testament, does not denote this. **Glory:** The manifestation of God in creation and nature. Compare Ps. 19:1.

4. The shaking of the foundation and the smoke are expressions of the glory and power of God (compare Rev. 15:8). These contributed to create the awe which made Isaiah think of his sins.

5. **Woe:** Means the very opposite of blessed, unhappy, wretched. Compare Luke 6:25, 26. **A man of unclean lips:** No doubt Isaiah felt the inclination to join in the praise of the seraphim, but he was restrained by the feeling of his sinfulness. He speaks of his lips as being impure, because they are the organs which he would have used in giving praise. **A people of unclean lips:** Nor

are they worthy to join the worship. Isaiah speaks of this because his mind is saturated with the atmosphere of ungodliness in which he lives and, may we not say, because he felt that he was partly guilty, inasmuch as he had made no effort to change his people? **Mine eyes have seen the King:** The Old Testament often teaches that the sight of God would bring death. Isaiah feels that he is in peril, since he was not worthy to see the Lord.

6. **A live coal:** Margin, "hot stone." On the domestic hearths of the ancients was kept a hot stone, and by heating it the heat from the fire could be transferred to any place where it might be needed. The altar had atoning power and so by this act its heat and purifying efficacy were transferred to Isaiah. "Fire is both a symbol of holiness and an agent of purification." Isaiah was therefore purified by this fire from the altar and made to partake of the divine holiness.

7. **This hat'n touched thy lips:** "As earthly fire burns away external impurity, so the heavenly fire burns away the defilement of sin, first from the lips, but through them from the whole man."—Dillman. **Thine iniquity is taken away and thy sin purged:** The word translated "purged" is a technical term and denotes that there is wrought for the sin of Isaiah that expiation or atonement which was accomplished by the sacrifices at the altar. The two benefits here attributed to the coal from the altar are related to each other as cause and effect. His iniquity, or guilt, was taken away because atonement had been made for his sin.

he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: 7 and he touched my mouth with it, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin forgiven. 8 And I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then I said, Here am I; send me. 9 And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. 10 Make

the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and turn again, and be healed. 11 Then said I, Lord, how long? And he answered, Until cities be waste without inhabitant, and houses without man, and the land become utterly waste, 12 and Jehovah have removed men far away, and the forsaken places be many

8. **The voice of the Lord:** Isaiah hears this for the first time. God's voice is not heard till there is purification. Whom shall I send? etc.: Observe that the Lord does not say where or for what purpose the messenger is to be sent. Isaiah's previous remark that he dwelt amid a people "of unclean lips" must have suggested to him the purpose of the sending. I . . . us: As is frequently the case in the Bible the pronoun applied to God changes from the singular to the plural. The plural in this case refers to the heavenly beings, the sons of God, the council of the holy ones (Ps. 89:5-7) who share the Lord's plans for man's redemption (Heb. 1:14).

9. **This people:** A designation for Israel that is somewhat contemptuous. Isaiah uses it frequently (8:6, 12; 9:16; 28:11, 14). **Hear ye indeed but understand not,** etc.: The effect of Isaiah's preaching will be to increase rather than to diminish the spiritual insensibility of the people. It is therefore to be directly the opposite from that which we should expect. This is always the effect of highly spiritual preaching that is not heeded. If it can not quicken it deadens; if it can not make better it depraves, and if it can not save it destroys.

10. **Make the heart fat:** The psalmist says that the heart of the proud is as fat as grease (Ps. 119:69, 70). It is the function of the heart to understand. So

by the heart is meant the intellectual powers of man. By becoming fat it becomes callous, insensible to spiritual things. **Turn and be healed:** Reform and be cleansed from sin. **How long?** Isaiah feels that this can not go on forever. There must be an end to this hardening, and so he asks how long before the day of reform and hope will take the place of the hardening.

11. **Until cities, etc.:** The answer to the prophet's question is that there will be no end to the process of hardening until the existing Israel is completely destroyed. Five calamities are mentioned and each one mentioned is worse than its predecessor.

12. **Have removed men far away:** This is a prediction of the captivity which took place when Judah was carried to Babylon. **Forsaken places:** Deserted homes and towns. "Of a truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without inhabitants" (Is. 5:9).

13. This verse contains two important truths, which at first seem to be contradictory. The first is that there is to be a destruction of the people. The second is that this destruction will stop just short of being a complete annihilation. **A tenth:** After the destroying agency has wrought such havoc that only one-tenth of the population remains, one should expect that God would put an end to it. But no, says Isaiah, even it

in the midst of the land. 13 And if there be yet a tenth in it, it also shall in turn be eaten up: as a terebinth, and as an

oak, whose stock remaineth, when they are felled; so the holy seed is the stock thereof.

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shall be eaten up. **A Terebinth:** A tree that is often confused with the oak, and which grows in many parts of Palestine. One of the differences between it and the oak is that it grows in the lower, warmer regions, while the latter is found in the higher, cooler places. **Stock:** Margin, "substance; the principle of life." Better still, "whose stump remaineth." Thus the desolation, as in the case of a tree cut down, is well nigh complete. **The holy seed:** As the stump of a tree that

has been cut down has the principle of life in its roots, so does the nation have within it a germ of life which will not be utterly destroyed. The existing nation should be utterly destroyed, but out of the captivity was to come forth a new nation. This was a favorite doctrine with Isaiah. He believed that a remnant should be saved. He even named one of his children "A-remnant-shall-return."

COMMENTS.

Isaiah's was no Unique Experience. The sixth chapter is the account of the call to service of one of God's faithful servants. This call is typical of the call of every man who is destined for high and honorable service in the cause of God. Within the compass of this brief chapter are to be found almost all of the experiences which the average man will have during a lifetime of service to his Master. Careful students of this chapter have reached the conclusion that Isaiah did not put it into written form till some years after he received the call. His experiences in the meantime had verified the prediction that his preaching would have an unfavorable reception. Human nature is always the same, and there is a monotony in the experience of those who toil with men. Hence it is that there is so close a parallel between the experiences of Isaiah and of later workers. First in his call and first in the call of every man who gives his life to God is the vision of God. To one who sees him, God appears holy, majestic and full of glory. Those who have such a vision must have a feeling of their own sinfulness. This

Moses, Job and Peter all felt, and Isaiah exclaimed: "I am a man of unclean lips." Such a feeling of unworthiness is the precursor of forgiveness, and in Isaiah's case purification followed confession of sinfulness. A man who tastes of the grace and mercy of God will find in that a call to service. It is not strange therefore that the voice of the angel telling him that his sin was purged had scarcely ceased speaking when he heard a mightier voice asking, "Whom shall I send?" The call is scarcely more than answered, before there comes one more feeling. It is the sense of the overburdening greatness of the task. It is not a human task merely, but it requires the toil of eternity. This story of Isaiah's call is therefore an epitome of the life labors of other servants of God. No vision, no sense of sin, no experience of forgiveness, no feeling of duty came to him that may not be the lot of any Christian. The ineffectualness of the labor may be his also.

Isaiah's Commission. (vs. 9, 10.) At first the statement of the purpose of Isaiah's preaching seems to involve an insoluble difficulty. It represents God as

purposing the hardening and the spiritual blinding of Israel. The purpose of prophetic preaching, as recognized everywhere in the Scripture, was to stimulate the acceptance by the people of divine truth. They were censured for not heeding the preaching of the prophets. Here Isaiah's mission is represented as being for the opposite purpose. The same contrast is to be found in the ministry of Christ. His parables were unquestionably framed and spoken for the purpose of imparting to people an understanding of the truth and to lead them to obey it. Yet on the occasion of first speaking in parables he makes his own this passage from our lesson (Matt. 13:14, 14). He, too, spoke *in order that* they should not perceive, nor understand (Mark 4:12). The difficulty, however, does not consist in the truth, but in the way it is stated. That the preaching which is not heeded has this effect is clearly recognized. We mean this by our frequently-used phrase "gospel hardened." The message that can not give light, blinds the eye so that the next ray can not enter it. The truth that is not heard does nevertheless deaden the auricular nerve so that the next time the truth is proclaimed the ear can not hear it. The people to whom Isaiah spoke were already so spiritually insensible and so morally depraved that the probabilities were strongly against his message awakening them from their spiritual apathy. Hence his preaching made them worse. Jesus had preached some time to the Galileans before he resorted to parables, and his heart is saddened because they will not give heed to this gracious message. His coming, therefore, made their sin the greater. All of this is clear and reasonable. Stated in this way it involves no difficulty, but both Isaiah and Jesus put it as though this were the design which God aimed to accomplish. Reason tells us God wished to heal, but the text says all of his efforts were put forth "lest they . . . be healed." This difficulty exists solely because of

the fact that the Bible, more especially the Old Testament, attributes all things directly to God. We think of God as the remote cause of all things in that through natural means over which he has absolute control he permits or produces them. To the Hebrew mind there was no intermediate forces. God was the first, the intermediate and only cause. According to our way of thinking, the effect of Isaiah's preaching was the result of the people's moral weakness and sin. God is not the cause in any sense other than that he permitted them to reject the prophet's preaching and grow morally worse. But the Jews did not distinguish between the things which God permitted and those which he caused. To them he *caused* and even purposed this, which was actually the result of their own depravity.

The Call to Service. "One can not pass away from these verses without observing the plain answer which they give to the question, What is a call to the ministry of God? In these days of dust and distraction, full of party cries, with so many side-issues of doctrine and duty presenting themselves, and the solid attractions of so many other services insensibly leading man to look for the same sort of attractiveness in the ministry, it may prove a relief to some to ponder the simple elements of Isaiah's call to be a professional and life-long prophet. Isaiah got no "call" in our conventional sense of the word, no compulsion that he must go, no articulate voice describing him as the sort of man needed for the work, nor any of those similar "calls" which sluggish and craven spirits so often desire to relieve them of the responsibility or the strenuous effort needed in deciding for a profession which their conscience will not permit them to refuse. Isaiah got no such call. After passing through the fundamental religious experience of forgiveness and cleansing, which are in every case the indispensable promise of life with God, Isaiah was left to himself.

No direct summons was addressed to him, no compulsion was laid on him; but he heard the voice of God asking generally for messengers, and he on his own responsibility answered it for himself in particular. He heard from the divine lips of the divine need for messengers, and he was immediately full of the mind that he was the man for the mission, and of the heart to give himself to it. So great an example can not be too closely studied by candidates for the ministry in our own day. Sacrifice is not the half-sleepy, half-reluctant submission to the force of circumstances or opinion, in which shape it is so often travestied among us, but the resolute self-surrender and willing resignation of a free and reasonable soul. There are many in our day who look for an irresistible compulsion into the ministry of the church; sensitive as they are to the material bias by which men roll off into other professions, they pray for something of a similar kind to prevail with them in this direction also. There are men who pass into the ministry by social pressure or the opinion of the circles they belong to, and there are men who adopt the profession simply because it is on the line of least resistance. From which false beginnings rise the spent force, the premature stoppages, the stagnancy, the aimlessness and heartlessness, which are the scandals of the professional ministry and the weakness of the Christian Church in our day. Men who drift into the ministry, as it is certain so many do, become mere ecclesiastical flotsam and jetsam, incapable of giving carriage to any soul across the waters of this life, uncertain of their own arrival anywhere, and of

all the waste of their generation the most patent and disgraceful. God will have no drift-wood for his sacrifices, no drift-men for his ministers. Self-consecration is the beginning of his service, and a sense of our own freedom and our own responsibility is an indispensable element in the act of self-consecration. We . . . not God . . . have to make the decision. We are not to be dead, but living sacrifices, and everything which renders us less than fully alive, both mars at the time the sincerity of our surrender and re-acts for evil upon the whole of our subsequent ministry." (G. A. Smith.)

The Home Missionary Lesson. Two weeks ago we studied a passage which was indicated as a basis for the imperative to strive for the Christianization of foreign lands. It was concluded then that the basis for missions—for philanthropy and all altruistic work, it may be added—is the pity of God. To that truth is now added another. The quotation immediately preceding this note correctly emphasizes that God gave no external call to the prophet. The imperative came from within his own soul. We, too, are to share the divine compassion, but under no constraint. It must be of our own free-will. Our consent will be obtained on the proper understanding and appreciation of two great facts. The first is God's attitude toward the sin and need of the world, and the second is of that sin and need itself. When we have an understanding of these two facts there will ring within our soul the same call which Isaiah heard. This will be the call to missions, to home and foreign alike.

THE LESSON STORY.

The "Kingly Prophet" Isaiah lived in Jerusalem in the days of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. His active ministry extended over a period of more than half a century. As the service of Isaiah

was confined within the limits of "Jerusalem and Judah," the study of this prophet throws much light upon the ever-varying history of that place and people during the period in which he lived;

for "more than Athens to Demosthenes, and Florence to Dante, was Jerusalem to Isaiah." He has traced for us the main features of her position, many of the great figures of her streets, the arrival of her embassies, and the fashions of her women. He has painted her aspect in triumph and in siege, in famine and in earthquake; war filling her valleys with chariots, and again nature rolling tides of fruitfulness up to her gates till we see them as clearly as the shadow following the sunshine across the cornfields of our own summers." (Farrar.) Nothing more is known of Isaiah than that his father's name was Amoz. His intimate relations with the court have given ground for the legend that he was of royal descent. But whether that be true or not matters little, since one so wise and noble in spirit needed not social rank to fit him for intimacy with kings and princes.

Isaiah had been born into the nation of Judah during the illustrious reign of Uzziah. As a young man his national pride must have been deeply stirred by the brilliant achievements of the king. He had seen the borders of Judah extended, her resources increased, her commerce restored, and her enemies on every side subdued. Through tribute and through commerce, great wealth had been poured into her treasury, thus enabling the king to fortify Jerusalem, to equip a large standing army, to build towers, hew out cisterns, and carry on extensive works of husbandry. Great had been Uzziah's achievements so that "his name spread far abroad, for he was marvelously helped till he was strong." Yet from this pinnacle of earthly glory the prophet had seen him fall into the dark abyss of ruin. Proud of his successes, he had attempted to burn incense in the Holy Place and suddenly been smitten with leprosy. Dethroned and banished, he had ended his days in a leper's hospital and been buried outside the sepulchre

of his fathers in a leper's grave. It was in this year of awful tragedy, "in the year king Uzziah died," that the prophet "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up." It was an epoch-making vision, for it meant to Isaiah "the passing away of his hero-worship, the dawn of his faith," and the beginning of his consecrated service. Out of the ignominious death of Judah's king came the glorious vision of the Heavenly King. The prophet now beheld with clear vision what before had been hidden. He "saw the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up" and realized the supremacy of his power and holiness. Awe-struck, he gazed upon the vision of the King Eternal. Around him were the enraptured seraphim who, veiling their faces and their feet, cried, "Holy, holy, holy is Jehovah of hosts. The whole earth is filled with his glory!" The prophet beheld and listened with feelings of awe and wonder, mingled with fear, for as the chorus swelled louder and louder, the very threshold and foundations were shaken and the temple was filled with smoke. Then in the soul of Isaiah burned the conviction of his own sinfulness, and he cried, "Woe is me, for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips." At this confession of his and Israel's sin, one of the seraphim flew quickly and catching up with his tongs a burning coal from the altar touched with it the prophet's lips, saying, "Lo, thine iniquity is cleaned, and thy sin forgiven."

Isaiah, cleansed from sin, then heard the voice of the Lord calling, "Whom shall I send? and who will go for us?" and answered from a willing heart, "Here am I; send me." The call was a difficult one; the call to bear the message to stubborn and rebellious Judah; but the prophet's service, begun in self-abasement and self-sacrifice, was henceforth to be free from hesitation and anxiety. It was to

be characterized by great boldness and absolute devotion. Through fifty years of Judah's changing history, Isaiah, ever

true to the vision, could say in every difficulty and every emergency, "Here am I; send me."

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. With what was king Uzziah smitten?

2. Who is said to have smitten Uzziah? 2 Chron. 26:20.

3. Why did Uzziah hasten to go out of the holy place in the temple?

4. What is the effect of bringing a sinful man into God's presence or of God's coming into the presence of a sinful man?

5. Why will the wicked princes, the great and rich but selfish men of earth,

call to the mountains and rocks to fall upon them in the day of the Lord? Rev. 6:15-17.

6. In the light of the Scriptures will there be any desire on the part of the wicked to dwell in the immediate presence of Christ?

7. How did the glory of Uzziah's reign in Jerusalem compare with that of the reign of any other king after Solomon?

8. What after all was the advantage to Uzziah of having been so great?

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. In what year did Isaiah see his vision and receive his call? Isa. 6:1.

2. Whom did Isaiah see in his vision and where? Isa. 6:1.

3. Although the glorious reign of Uzziah had ended in sorrow and humiliation, what assurance did Isaiah receive from his vision? Isa. 6:1-2.

4. What did the seraphim cry? Isa. 6:3.

5. What did the seraphim declare as to the earthly extent of the Lord's glory? Isa. 6:3.

6. What two remarkable signs occurred when the angels spoke? Isa. 6:4.

7. What then did Isaiah say concerning himself? Isa. 6:5.

8. Why did the prophet feel so deeply his own uncleanness? Isa. 6:5.

9. How does the reverence here felt and expressed, contrast with the act of

Uzziah in entering the holy place to offer sacrifice? 2 Chron. 26:16-20.

10. What was the immediate response to the exclamation of Isaiah concerning his own uncleanness? Isa. 6:6-7.

11. What was the effect upon Isaiah of the live coal that touched his lips? Isa. 6:6-7.

12. What after this cleansing did Isaiah hear? Isa. 6:8.

13. What was the earnest response? Isa. 6:6-8.

14. What message was he to carry to the people? Isa. 6:9, 10.

15. Why do you suppose the people were so slow to understand? Isa. 6:10.

16. What question did Isaiah then ask? Isa. 6:11.

17. What was the Lord's answer? Isa. 6:11-12.

18. What lesson may we learn here of the Lord's patience? Isa. 6:11-13.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. Note that Isaiah was the great Messianic prophet, who so often gave foregleams of the coming of Christ.

2. In the midst of outward decay and

gloom, vanity and failure, a clear view of the Lord in his greatness and glory is reassuring and inspiring. Paul had a vision in Jerusalem, at Troas, on board

the corn ship, and was cheered by the presence and promises of God.

3. The vision was one, not of limitation to the temple and the Jews; but of universality, glory that filled the whole earth and of the holy Being, whose very presence is torture to sin and uncleanness. The only hope for comfort and peace in the Divine presence must come through cleansing.

4. Isaiah, although so great a prophet, was far beneath the Lord of glory, whom he saw "high and lifted up," whose train filled the temple. Jesus is greater far than Abraham, who rejoiced to see his day; greater than David, the shepherd king of Israel, who said, "The Lord is my Shepherd. I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters. His rod and his staff comfort me." Christ is the Good Shepherd. David, being a prophet, spoke of Christ as his good shepherd.

5. There is cleansing from sin which cleansing the Lord will bestow if men will seek it with all their hearts. How awful the consciousness of sin that hinders communion with God and joy in his presence! This realization of cleansing is essential to acceptable and successful service for God. How many are hampered and held back because of sin!

6. We all need visions of God, new and refreshing views of God and of duty. Isaiah's was a hard and patient task, but he was assured of God's glory and providence; he was illuminated as to his high duty and was prepared for it.

7. The Lord waits for prepared and willing servants—men and women ready each to say: "Here am I, Lord. Send me." In view of Jesus' sacrifice and the world's sore needs, every one ought to go as a missionary, or to do the next best and necessary thing, give very liberally and cheerfully for the world's salvation.

Lesson VIII.

May 21.

SONG OF THE VINEYARD.

(Temperance Lesson.)

Isaiah 5:1-12.

GOLDEN TEXT—Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink. Isa. 5-20.

Memory Verse—11. **Suggested Reading**—Isaiah 5 and 28. **Time**—About 755 B. C. **Persons**—The prophet and the inhabitants of Jerusalem and Judah. **Place**—Jerusalem.

DAILY READINGS.

May 15.... M—Isaiah 5:1-12—Song of the Vineyard.
 May 16.... T—Isaiah 5:12-23—The Captivity of the Drunken.
 May 17.... W—Isaiah 28:1-13—Woe to the Crown of Pride of the Drunkards.
 May 18.... T—Amos 4:1-13—"Bring, and Let Us Drink."
 May 19.... F—Amos 6:1-11—Woe to Those Who Drink Wine in Bowls.
 May 20.... S—Prov. 23:1-21—The Drunkard Shall Come to Poverty.
 May 21.... S—Prov. 23:29-35—The Woes of the Drunkard.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

In the study of Isaiah 6 it was concluded that this was the prophet's first call to become a prophet. Chapter 5 belongs to a later date, but how much later can be determined only by a careful study of the allusions found in the chapter to the circumstances and conditions of the people. The reign of Uzziah was brilliant and the conditions of the people prosperous. The reign of Jotham was likewise a time of peace and material comfort. The first year of the reign of Ahaz was marked by a defensive war with Israel and Damascus. The Assyrians, too, were on the borders during this reign,

and their movements so disturbed the peace and harmony of the land that it is not unlikely that this national anxiety would be reflected in some way from any prophecy of this period. The middle part of the fifth chapter (8-23) affords us a fair picture of the internal condition of affairs in Judah. It was a time of peace, of prosperity, of land buying (8), of drunkenness (11) and of merry-making (12). The passage more likely belongs to the reign of Jotham. Times of adversity are drawing near, however, and so it is natural to assign it to the latter part of that reign.

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

Our lesson consists of two parts, and the second is itself but a part of a larger passage. The first half of the lesson is the parable of the vineyard and its application (vs. 1-7). It is "one of the finest exhibitions of rhetorical skill and power which the book contains. The prophet appears in the guise of a minstrel before an assemblage of his countrymen, and

proceeds to recite the unfortunate experience of a 'friend' of his with his vineyard. The simple story, told in light, popular verse, disarms the suspicions of the crowd, and the singer, having secured their sympathy, demands a verdict on the course which a man might be expected to pursue with so refractory a vineyard as this (v. 3). The answer was so obvi-

1 Let me sing for my well-beloved a song of my beloved touching his vineyard. My well-beloved had a vineyard in a very fruitful hill: 2 and he digged it, and gathered out the stones thereof,

and planted it with the choicest vine, and built a tower in the midst of it, and also hewed out a winepress therein: and he looked that it should bring forth grapes, and it brought forth wild grapes.

ous that the people, like our Lord's hearers on a similar occasion (Matt. 21:41), had practically assented to their own condemnation before they clearly perceived the drift of the discourse. But from this point onwards the parable becomes more and more transparent, till at last the prophet, with a sudden change of rhythm (see on v. 6), throws off all disguise and drives home the lesson of the whole in the crashing lines of verse 7." (Skinner.) Isaiah 5:8-24 is an indictment against Judah which contains six counts. Each is introduced by the word "woe," and a study of the passage shows that it was addressed exclusively to the upper classes, but, as the prophet pointed out, their sins will fall upon the nation as a whole. The first woe is pronounced against those who are greedy for the possession of land

(vs. 8-10). The second woe is against drunkenness and its kindred evils of frivolity and over-indulgence in pleasure (vs. 11-16). The lesson comes to an end before the prophet's denunciation of this evil is completed. The other sins denounced are "a moral blindness and headlong audacity of sin which habitual avarice and drunkenness soon develop (18-21), and, again, a greed of drink and money, men's perversion of their strength to wine, and of their opportunities of justice to the taking of bribes" (22-24). The two sins which are so prominent in this passage are avarice and sensuality. They were debasing the people and destroying public virtue. Worse than this, they are producing religious insensibility and perverting the moral tone of the people.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 1. Let me sing: This indicates that what follows is poetry. **My well-beloved:** This properly denotes a friend or a favorite. God is the friend referred to, though the prophet does not hint of that till sometime later. **My beloved:** A different word is used here, but the change is probably for the meter only. **A vineyard:** By this the prophet refers to the land of Palestine, but that is not made clear till some verses further on. **A very fruitful hill:** A sunny slope where the vine would flourish. The commentaries quote Virgil, who says "Bacchus (the vine) loves open hills."

2. The previous verse states that the situation was all that could be desired. This one tells that labor was not spared.

Digged it: To make the soil mellow and loose. **Gathered out the stones:** The hillsides of Palestine are very stony. This would aid the growth of the roots and facilitate cultivation. **The choicest vine:** This is the name for the finest species of grape grown in Palestine. It is said to have had very small and almost imperceptible seeds. The same word is used in Jer. 2:21. **Built a tower:** This was for the purpose of guarding the vineyard. The owners of vineyards lived in villages and lodged in the towers within the vineyard during the time of the vintage only. Such towers are still in use in the fields about Damascus. "In Hauran every garden has its tower." "In Damascus plain four poles are put in the

3 And now, O inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge, I pray you, betwixt me and my vineyard. 4 What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it? wherefore, when I looked that it should bring forth grapes, brought it forth wild grapes? 5 And now I will tell you what I will do to my vineyard: I will take away the hedge thereof, and it shall be

eaten up; I will break down the wall thereof, and it shall be trodden down: 6 and I will lay it waste; it shall not be pruned nor hoed; but there shall come up briars and thorns: I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain upon it. 7 For the vineyard of Jehovah of hosts is the house of Israel, and the men of Judah his pleasant plant; and he looked for justice, but, behold, oppres-

ground and a cage put on top in which men spend night and day guarding crops." "In Hauran these towers were built of stone and many still stand." (Wright's Palmyra and Zenobia.) Winepress: The marginal reading should be adopted. This was the vat cut out of the rock into which the juice was run and stored. The owner was confident of a return for his labor. (Compare with this verse Matt. 21:33). Wild grapes: Gesenius and some other scholars understand the word to mean not merely uncultivated, but poisonous grapes.

3. And now: These words mark the beginning of a new stage in the poetry and a change of subject. The prophet passes from the parable to the interpretation. Betwixt me and my vineyard: Up to this point the prophet has spoken of the vineyard of his beloved, but now the owner of the vineyard, God, becomes the speaker. This is the first hint that the story has a deeper meaning. Note, however, that the fact that God is the owner is not yet made clear. What could, etc.: The owner had done those things mentioned in v. 2. This was all that was necessary for a vineyard. Failure to produce grapes can not be laid to the blame of the owner. So God had done all for Judah that was necessary to enable her to produce righteousness. The question does not mean that God had reached the limit of his power, but that he had done all that the circumstances required. Wherefore when I looked . . .

wild grapes: The answer must be that it is the fault of the vines. The owner has presented his case and vindicated himself.

5, 6. In these verses the owner passes sentence upon the vineyard. Its fate is to be complete destruction.

5. The vineyard was guarded against the ravages of wild animals by a double protection, a hedge of thorns and a wall of stones. The removal of these would be followed by its complete destruction. This was prophetic of the desolation of Judah.

6. The vineyard is to be thrown out upon the commons. The lack of pruning and cultivation will make the ruin complete. There is no more hope for the vineyard. I will also command the clouds, etc.: No man can do this, hence the owner must be no other than Jehovah. This is the first time that the real significance of the story has come to the light. It has been told with great skill. The interest up to this point has been in the story itself, but now the mask is removed and the hidden truth is brought to light. In the Hebrew there is at this point a change of rhythm. (See Introduction.)

7. In this verse is the formal application of the parable. Two points stand out: (1) The vineyard is Israel, more especially Judah; (2) the wild grapes were oppression and perversion of justice. Instead of producing the righteousness which God desired, they produced un-

sion; for righteousness, but, behold, a cry.

8 Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no room, and ye be made to dwell alone in the midst of the land! 9 In mine ears saith Jehovah of hosts, Of a

truth many houses shall be desolate, even great and fair, without inhabitant.

10 For ten acres of vineyard shall yield one bath, and a homer of seed shall yield but an ephah. 11 Woe unto them that rise up early in the morning, that they may follow strong drink; that tarry late

righteousness. In this verse Isaiah is again the speaker. The vineyard his pleasant plant: Hebrew parallelism. This means that Israel was the vineyard. The choice part of it was Judah. He looked for justice, but, behold, oppression: In this and the next clause there is in the Hebrew a *paranomasia* or play upon the similarity of the sound of the words. By translating the original words in English letters this will be apparent. He looked for the *mishpot* (justice), but behold *mishpak* (oppression; literally, shedding of blood). For righteousness, but behold a cry: He looked for *tsedaka* (righteousness), but behold *tse'aka* (cry, clamor, that is. of the oppressed). On the meaning of the word cry, compare Job 19:7; "I cry out of wrong, but I am not heard; I cry for help, but there is no justice." The Hebrews were fond of such play upon words as are found in this verse, and in this case it would serve the good purpose of impressing the truth in the memory of the hearers.

8. Here begins the second part of the lesson, though no new subject is introduced. In this the prophet specifies the *wild grapes* by naming some of the sins of which Judah was guilty. Woe: This amounts almost to a curse or a malediction. Join house to house lay field to field: The wrong denounced here is that of a rich man purchasing small estate till he became the possessor of a vast territory. The injustice in this consisted in the first place in the fraudulent and oppressive methods which were used to gain possession of the land, and in the second, in the fact that the

evicted landowner, being unable to buy other land, was virtually deprived of the rights of citizenship. His condition was little better than that of a slave. Other prophets denounced this same evil. Amos 2:6, 7; Micah 2:2-9; Jer. 22:13-17; Hab. 2:9-12; Neh. 5:1-5. The law provided certain checks to this evil, notably the law of the year of Jubilee, but in such times of general disregard of the law these expedients failed. There be no room, etc.: With the loss of right to land there was a loss also of residential rights. Judah was about to be converted into a land where wealthy men only dwelt.

9. In mine ears: In the ears of Isaiah. He heard Jehovah saying this, "Of a truth," etc. Many houses shall be desolate, etc.: A prediction of the captivity. The rich were removing the poor people from the land; it will remove the rich also. Their houses will be made as desolate by the captivity as they are now making the houses of the poor.

10. Jehovah's remedy for land-greed will be barrenness of the land. Ten acres: An acre was the amount which a yoke of oxen could plow in one day. This is literally "ten yoke." One bath: A little less than eight gallons. This was almost no yield. A homer of seed shall yield an ephah: The ephah and the bath were of the same capacity, and each was the tenth of a homer (Ez. 45:11). The reaper was, therefore, to gather but one-tenth as much as he had sown. We are to understand that this barrenness of the soil was to be caused by the captivity.

11. With this verse begins the second woe, which is against drunkenness and

into the night, till wine inflame them!
12 And the harp and the lute, and the tab-
ret and the pipe, and wine, are in their

feasts; but they regard not the work of
Jehovah, neither have they considered
the operation of his hands.

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its results. It really extends to the end of verse 16. **That rise up early**, etc.: This indicated confirmed intemperance. The habit of early drinking seems to have been regarded with great dislike. (Eccl. 10:16, 17; Acts 2: 15.) **Strong drink**: A general name for various kinds of intoxicating drinks produced by the fermentation of dates, raisins, honey, grain, etc. **Tarry late into the night**: This shows the intoxication was not very complete nor very rapid. Hence the percentage of alcohol in the drink was not great. Orientals delight to drink for long hours at a stretch. **Wine inflame them**: Compare the Indian name for whiskey, "fire water."

12. The first half of this verse describes riotous merry-making at a drunken feast. With it compare Amos 6:5, 6. "That sing idle songs to the sound of the viol, that invent for themselves instruments of music, like David, that drink wine in bowls," etc. They regard not the work of Jehovah, etc.: "The work of Jehovah and the operation of his hands" was all that he had done in the past to punish sins, and especially that which he was about to do, send Judah into captivity. The merry-makers that Amos denounced were "not grieved for the affliction of Joseph." **Harp**: Probably something like the modern guitar. It was the sacred instrument used by David, but was often employed for base purposes. (Isa. 23:16.)

COMMENTS.

The Details of the Parable. (vs. 1, 2.) Interpreters of this parable of Isaiah have erred in explaining it in exactly the same way that they have erred in interpreting the parables of our Lord. Each of these was intended to teach one and only one lesson, but interpreters have sought a spiritual meaning in every detail. A good example of this method, a method that should be avoided, is Jerome's interpretation of Isaiah's parable. "By the metaphor of the vineyard is to be understood the people of the Jews which he surrounds or inclosed by angels, by gathering out the stones, the removal of idols, by the tower, the temple erected in the midst of Judea, by the wine-press, the altar." Compare with this overwrought interpretation the application of the parable by the prophet himself in verse 7. Here the vineyard is identified with the chosen people, more

particularly Judah, since Isaiah addressed the people of Judah. Just as the owner of the vineyard obtained wild grapes instead of the chosen variety which he expected, so Jehovah obtained from Judah oppression and injustice instead of the righteousness for which he hoped. It was intended to drive home the lesson that they had sorely sinned, though care and forethought had been expended upon them with the view of making them a people worthy of God's name. This is a better explanation than to make it sprawl over all divine grace and comprehend every detail of God's redemptive work.

God's Grace is Our Opportunity. The remoter lesson of the parable of the vineyard is that God's favors are not for our present benefit merely, but give to us opportunities of bearing for him the fruit of personal and social righteousness. His favors should not make us proud, but

humble. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth." What a distinction was this and how elated Israel was over being the Lord's chosen people. But the prophet's deduction from this was quite different from the popular one. "Therefore, I will visit upon you all of your iniquities." Amos 3:2. In the advantages which we possess, in the power with which we are clothed, in our civilization, there lie our deepest responsibility. The fostering care of God as depicted in the parable of the vineyard became the ground of Israel's condemnation; so our own benefits will, if they do not lead us to a higher righteousness, the more certainly condemn us.

The Two Great Sins of Judah. (vs. 8-12.) Though our lesson contains but one and a part of another of the six woes pronounced by Isaiah against the wealthy men of Judah, yet in these two we have the two greatest sins which in varying form stand out in this and in other chapters of Isaiah. They are avarice and drunkenness. Each carries with it a number of kindred evils which may be regarded as the result of the parent vice. Avarice then and always produced insensibility to the feelings of others, it hardened the heart against pity, and yielded oppression and injustice. The avarice was producing the depopulation of the land, and depriving men of their civil rights. "The women of my people cast out from their pleasant houses, from their young children ye take away my glory forever." (Mich 2:9.) Amos, Hosea, Micah, Jeremiah, all denounce this passion of the people of their time for wealth and hold to the light its evil effects in exactly the same way that Isaiah does. The other great vice was intemperance. It was accompanied by an inordinate love of pleasure, a blindness to the distinction between right and wrong and gross perversions of civil justice. These evil effects of intemperance are referred to elsewhere by Isaiah and by other prophets also. "These reel with wine,

and stagger with strong drink; the priest and the prophet reel with strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they stagger with strong drink; they err in vision, they stumble in judgment." (Isa. 28:7.) Compare Isa. 22: 13, 14; 28:1, 9; Hosea 4:11; Amos 6:5, 6.

The Persistence of These Vices. "It is with remarkable persistence that in every civilization the two main passions of the human heart, love of wealth and love of pleasure, the instinct to gather and the instinct to squander, have sought precisely these two forms denounced by Isaiah in which to work their social havoc—appropriation of the soil and indulgence in strong drink. Every civilized community develops sooner or later its land question and its liquor question. 'Questions' they are called by the superficial opinion that all difficulties may be overcome by the cleverness of men; yet problems through which there cries for remedy so vast a portion of our poverty, crime and madness, are something worse than 'questions.' They are huge sins, and require not merely the statesman's wit, but all the penitence and zeal of which a nation's conscience is capable. It is in this that the force of Isaiah's treatment lies. We feel he is not facing questions of state, but sins of men. He has nothing to tell us of what he considers the best system of land tenure, but he enforces the principle that in the ease with which land may be absorbed by one person the natural covetousness of the human heart has a terrible opportunity for working ruin upon society. 'Woe unto them that join house to house, that lay field to field, till there be no room, and ye be made to dwell alone in the midst of the land.' We know from Micah that the actual process which Isaiah condemns was carried out with most cruel evictions and disinheritances. Isaiah does not touch on its methods, but exposes its effects on the country—depopulation and barrenness,—and emphasizes its religious significance." (G. A. Smith).

LESSON STORY.

The story of God's kindness to the Jewish nation is a long and tender one marked with mercy all the way. The Jews were his peculiar people. He cherished them as a family, a flock, a vineyard, a nation. He planted them in a very fruitful hill. He gave them wonderful and long-continued opportunities. They had been rich indeed if they had only honored God with their hearts and their substance. He planted them well and proffered them much. They were his peculiar delight.

He fenced them in from the incursions of their enemies. They were shut in and the enemy was shut out. Against how many dangers, seen and unseen, he guarded them they shall never know until he shall recite the acts of his loving providence. He gave his angels charge concerning them.

They should have been content to live within the limits of his law and enjoy the liberties and protection of his providence and bring forth fruits to his glory and their joy.

God watched over his vineyard both night and day. The God of Israel never slumbered nor slept. He sent the dew and the rain each in its season. Man may plant and water, but God must give the increase. In this case God planted, watered and longed to bestow the rich increase. It is a joy indeed to know that the eyes that wept over Jerusalem watch over those who love God and are called according to his purpose.

He gathered out the stones. He desired a full and perfect fruitage. Not only did he protect his people from their enemies without; he also removed their enemies from within. As nothing without could destroy, so nothing within should hinder the coming fruitage. We may ask God to remove that which hinders the cultivation of the soil, the growth of the vines, the bearing and gathering of the fruit. They who obey shall find their

work no harder than is necessary for their greatest good.

Even chastisements are carefully measured and adapted to the necessities of God's children. He will make the rough places smooth when best.

Moreover he planted it with choicest vines. God is never slothful in his enterprise. He is masterful and munificent in the prosecution of his designs. How carefully the skilled farmer or gardener selects his seed or plants. There must be no disease. There must be no imperfection in the young vines planted tenderly in the very fruitful soil. From such patriarchs as Abraham, the father of the faithful and the friend of God, they had sprung. Their fathers had taught them the words of Jehovan their God. Mighty prophets had taught them of the golden Messianic age to come. They had been guarded sedulously from heathen contamination, for out of Israel was to come the Seed that should bruise the head of the serpent and in whom all nations should be blessed.

He gave them a tower for defence and rest, protection and constant supervision. The eyes of the Lord are upon them that fear him, and he guideth them forward to abiding and abundant delight. When the children of God lie down at night to sleep there is one on watch whose eyes both follow and go before them. He giveth his beloved sleep. He seeth the wolf coming to the flock, the enemy to the vineyard, and layeth down his life to protect them and save them.

He made a wine-press within his vineyard, within the safe enclosure, so that the fruit might be prepared for use free from the assaults of Satan and the world without. The fruits were love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control. In the redemption of his people he trod

the wine-press alone and stained his holy garments with the blood of grapes.

But he was disappointed in Israel. He knew what was in man. He remembered that he was dust. He required only a reasonable service, a spiritual sacrifice. Instead of the fruit of righteousness Israel brought forth wild grapes. Avarice, drunkenness, corruption, injustice, self-

conceit, pride and hardness of heart—these were the fruit that grew in that sacred, favored vineyard.

But the Lord, high and lifted up, whom Isaiah saw and worshiped, shall come to redeem his vineyard. He shall be slain, but seeing of the travail of soul shall yet be satisfied. Oh, ye vineyard of the Lord, bring forth fruit wherein the Master shall be glorified!

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What was the real condition of Judah at the time of Isaiah's vision?
2. To what extent had the Lord prospered Uzziah and his kingdom?
3. What was Uzziah's special weakness or sin?
4. What specific act of his indicated

his irreverence, disobedience and stubborn pride?

5. How was his presumption treated by the priests of the temple?

6. What was the distressing result of his disobedience and profanation?

7. What is your estimate of Uzziah's character?

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. Concerning what is the song of the vineyard? Isa. 5:1.
2. What five particular things had the Beloved done for his vineyard? Isa. 5:2.
3. After all his faithful preparation what might he reasonably expect? Isa. 5:2.
4. What kind of fruit did it produce—and what the lesson? Isa. 5:2.
5. To whom especially was the vineyard song intended to appeal? Isa. 5:3.
6. Why was the owner of the vineyard free from blame? Isa. 5:4.
7. What four destructive things did the Beloved resolve to do? Isa. 5:5, 6.
8. What then would grow in the vineyard instead of grapes? Isa. 5:6.
9. What, in plain words, was the vineyard intended to represent? Isa. 5:7.
10. What did it include as "the plant of his delight"? Isa. 5:7.
11. What particularly was meant by the grapes? Isa. 5:7.
12. What, on the other hand, was signified by wild grapes? Isa. 5:7.
13. Against what dreadful sin did the prophet pronounce the first woe? Isa. 5:8.

14. What was to be the prophesied result of their avarice? Isa. 5:9, 10.

15. What other great sin, beside avarice, received the second woe? Isa. 5:11.

16. In their intemperance what instruments of pleasure did they seek? Isa. 5:12.

17. What in their fleshly pleasure did they disregard? Isa. 5:12.

18. Their predicted captivity should be caused by the lack of what? Isa. 5:13.

19. What kind of knowledge is to be inferred and why? Isa. 5:13. Rom. 1:28-32.

20. How general was their calamity to become? Isa. 5:13-15.

21. Out of it all and in spite of it all what would result? Isa. 5:16, 17.

22. What expressions are used with reference to those who would harden their hearts against God and his judgments? Isa. 5:18, 1.

23. What particular blindness and hardness are condemned? Isa. 5:20.

24. What was the prophet's message and woe against self-conceit? Isa. 5:21.

25. What did the prophet think of the drunkenness of his people? Isa. 5:22.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING.

1. "A man had two sons and he came to the first, and said, Son, go work to-day in my vineyard. And he answered and said, I will not! But afterwards he repented and went. And he came to the second and said likewise. And he answered, and said, I go sir; and went not. Which of the two did the will of his father?" Matt. 21 28-30. The Jews to whom Jesus spoke this parable had been favored and had promised to be faithful, but had sinned and refused to obey; had refused John the Baptist and were then refusing Jesus. Hence the publicans and harlots would enter the kingdom before they. To go forth to labor daily in the Lord's vineyard is the duty of every son of God. The Lord is seeking for laborers.

2. In the following verses of the twenty-first chapter of Matthew is set forth by our Saviour in another very striking parable the unfaithfulness of the chosen people with respect to his vineyard. He shows that thorough preparation had been made of his vineyard; that he had let it out to husbandmen to care for; that he sent his servants at the proper season to receive his share of the fruits; that the husbandmen beat, stoned and killed them; that he sent yet other servants more than at the first, and to these they did likewise; finally he sent his own Son, saying, they will reverence him; but him also they killed. "What, therefore," Jesus asked, "will the Lord of the vineyard do unto those husbandmen?" Thus the Jews were led to condemn their own conduct.

3. Avarice that adds field to field, regardless of the rights and needs of others, is one of the crying sins and crimes of our age as it was in the days of Uzziah. Covetousness in the light of

the New Testament is more hideous and detestable, more heinous and disastrous than it was under the moonlight of Judaism. The extortions, oppressions, tyrannies of the great trusts that have flourished and fattened upon the rights and industries of the poor, of the individual citizen, are full of deadly peril to the nation. Statesmen are wrestling with the problem as to the best method of suppressing or regulating them. The gospel of Christ cuts at the very root of the trouble. It, rather than legislation, must supply the cure. The church must take up the question, each congregation for itself, in the light of the New Testament. The individual should remember the awful judgment upon covetousness in the New Testament.

4. Drunkenness is receiving attention at the hands of the church of God. I do not think the woe pronounced upon the drunkards is severe enough to-day. They can not enter the kingdom, even as the covetous can not. The enormity of the sin and terribleness of moderate drinking needs tremendous emphasis. A man cannot play with fire and not get burnt. Besides to drink is essentially the same as to become drunken. It is the highway to drunkenness, and drunkenness is only a consequence of drinking. The drunkard maker is doubly sinful and injurious.

5. Especially is the Christian to consider his example with reference to others. There are thousands of weak and easily tempted souls. Each is to look not only upon his own things but upon the things of others. If I love my brother as myself I am not to do anything whereby he is made to stumble. Jesus loved others better than himself. And we are to love one another as he loves us.

Lesson IX.

May 28.

MICAHA'S PICTURE OF UNIVERSAL PEACE.

(International Peace Lesson.)

Micah 4:1-8.

GOLDEN TEXT—Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. Micah 4:3.

Memory Verses—2, 3. **Suggested Reading**—The Book of Micah. **Time**—740 B. C. **Place**—Mareshah, the native place of Micah.

DAILY READINGS.

- May 22.... M—Micah 4:1-8—Micah's Picture of Universal Peace.
 May 23.... T—Micah 1:1-16—Israel's Wounds are Incurable.
 May 24.... W—Micah 2:1-13—The Lord their King is Passed on Before Them.
 May 25.... T—Micah 4:9—5:1—From Babylon Shalt Thou be Rescued.
 May 26.... F—Micah 3:1-12—"Is not the Lord in the midst of us?"
 May 27.... S—Micah 5:1-15—"Shall Feed His Flock in the Strength of the Lord."
 May 28.... S—Micah 6:1—7:20—Who Pardoneth Like unto God?

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Micah tells us that he was a Morash-tite (1:1), and by this same title the elders of the land in the time of Jehoiakim refer to him (Jer. 26:18). In the hill country between the mountain ridge of Judah and the Maritime Plain was a village or town which bore the name of Mareshah. Micah refers to it (1:15), as do also Joshua (15:44) and the Chronicler (2 Chron. 11:8, 14:9-10, 21:37). Here Asa defeated Zerah, the Ethiopian (2 Chron. 14:9-10), and from this town came another prophet, Eliezer of the time of Jehoshaphat. It had some prominence in the time of the Maccabees (1 Mac. 5:66; Josephus Ant. xiii:9:1), but after this it loses its prominence; nothing now remains but a trace of the ancient name in the modern Merash. Here Micah was born and, according to Jerome, buried also. Jerusalem was the chief object and scene of his ministry because the corruption of the kingdom came forth from it. It is not likely, however, that he ever lived there, for most of his ref-

erences to places are to those that were near his native town.

The Prophet Micah. The title of his book informs us that Micah prophesied in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. His ministry began later and ended earlier than Isaiah's. Amos had been silent for a number of years, and if Hosea still lingered it was as an extremely old man. The great prophet of Jerusalem was, however, in the full tide of his powers at the time that Micah began his career. Samaria was hastening to its final doom, and Jerusalem was cowed in terror before the awe-inspiring Assyrian host. From Mareshah Micah could see the Assyrian army as it traveled the coast road, the great military highway between Asia and Egypt. The moving of armies along this highway was not infrequent in Micah's time, for Assyria and Egypt were engaged in a life-and-death struggle. The embassies which Isaiah tells us went out from Jerusalem to Egypt, and in which a foolish people put so much hope, must have passed by

Micah's home. It was certainly a strange atmosphere in which this man lived to awaken within his breast thoughts of universal peace. Micah's message was not solely of peace. Our lesson is but a small section of a brief book, and the greater part of it has to tell of an awful, devastating war which is just at hand. Because of their sins both Samaria and Jerusalem are to fall prey to Assyria, and it is only when he looks far beyond the present that Micah seems to hear the din of war die down, to be followed by more joyous sounds of universal peace. Much of his book is devoted to the denunciation of the prevailing sins of his day, and these are: "Extreme oppression, violence among the rich, bribing among judges, priests, prophets; building up the capital even at cost of

life or actual bloodshed; spoliation, expulsion of the powerless women and children from their homes, covetousness, cheating in dealings, pride. These, of course, may be manifoldly repeated in lesser places of resort and of judgment. But it is Zion and Jerusalem which are so built up with blood; Zion and Jerusalem which are, on that ground, to be plowed as a field; it is the city to which the Lord's voice crieth, whose rich men are full of violence; it is the daughter of Zion which is to go forth out of the city and go to Babylon. Especially they are the heads and princes of the people, whom he upbraids for perversion of justice and for oppression. Even the good kings of Judah seem to have been powerless to restrain the general corruption." (Pusey.)

MICAH'S, OR ISAIAH'S.

The first part of our lesson is the famous prophecy of the mountain of the Lord's house, which is found also, with some slight omissions and variations, in the second chapter of Isaiah. No one to-day would think of contending that it was written by both prophets independently. Such coincidences do not happen in ordinary life, and to say that God brought it about miraculously would be attributing to him something that is beneath the dignity of his character. Either Micah wrote it and Isaiah borrowed it, or Isaiah wrote it and Micah borrowed it. Other theories have been suggested, such as that it was written by some earlier prophet and both appropriated it, but there is little to commend the adoption of such an explanation. It and even more radical theories are supported by arguments that are far from convincing and which depend largely upon the preconceived theories of the history held by the one advancing the argument. We return, therefore, to the original question as to whether Micah or Isaiah was the original writer. To

this scholars have given conflicting answers, and no certainty is possible. In favor of the authorship by Micah are the two facts that his is probably in the more original form and there is a connection of thought in the immediate context which makes it quite natural in Micah. The previous chapter closes with the prediction that "the mountain of the house" shall become as "the high places of a forest." In contrast to this he tells immediately after what the fountain of Jehovah's house shall be in the latter days. In Isaiah the passage is isolated. Whichever be the author, it is evident that the other did not hesitate to make use of it. Quotation marks were then unknown, and plagiarism had not yet been christened. Probably the borrower would have been surprised to know that men of a later age would be pilloried for doing that which he was doing in all innocence. In one other passage Isaiah seems to make use of the words of an earlier speaker, though he does not mention his name (16:13). The duplication of these passages suggests that the prophets did not obtain their messages without

1 But in the latter days it shall come to pass, that the mountain of Jehovah's house shall be established on the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills; and peoples shall flow unto it. 2 And many nations shall go

and say, Come ye, and let us go up to the mountain of Jehovah, and to the house of the God of Jacob; and he will teach us of his ways, and we will walk in his paths. For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of Jehovah

thought. Sometimes they found in the words of another a statement of the case which was better than anything they could then produce. When this circum-

stance presented itself, like wise men they appropriated the words as their own. How very human they were, after all!

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 1. But: Introduces the contrast to the former description of the impending condition of the mountain of the house (3:12). **In the latter days:** This is a phrase often used in prophecy (Dan. 2:28, 10:14; Hosea 3:5, Acts 2:7). It came to have a definite reference to the time of the Messiah, and the New Testament writers speak of the dispensation of Christ as "the last times" or "the last days" (1 Pet. 1:20; Heb. 1:1, 9:26; 1 Cor. 10:11; Eph. 2:18; 1 Tim. 4:1). It is not probable that in Micah's time the phrase was understood to have so definite a meaning, and to his readers it probably signified that what he was now telling would happen in after days, in the future, quite likely in the distant future. As the glories of the Davidic kingdom faded and the hopes of the saints were transferred to the future, they came to identify these prophecies of the future with the glories of the Messianic age. **Mountain of Jehovah's house:** The mountain on which Jehovah's house stood, Mount Moriah, one of the peaks of Mount Zion (3:10-12). Compare Ps. 68:16: "Why look . . . at the mountain which God hath desired for his abode? Yea, Jehovah will dwell in it forever." **Established:** The form of the original denotes a certain and unmovable state, so that Pusey translates it, "Shall be abidingly established." **On the top of the mountain:** The margin, *at the*

head of the mountains, gives the sense. The other mountains are symbols of the worship of other gods. The worship of Jehovah shall have prominence and supremacy over other faiths. **Peoples shall flow unto it:** This means Gentile peoples. Isaiah has nations, Jer. 51:44 says that nations were flowing to Bel in Babylon. In that future time the flow of humanity was to be towards Zion instead.

2. Many nations: That is, Gentiles. This verse is but an expansion of the previous statement that "all peoples shall flow unto it." Isaiah has *peoples* instead of *nations*. The two are equivalent. **Say:** Exhort one another. **And he will teach, etc.:** This really expresses the purpose of their going and may be translated "that he may teach," etc. **For:** Introduces the reason why many nations are seeking the God of Jacob. They have previously learned of him from Jerusalem. **The law:** The original has no definite article before the word *law*. It is explained by the corresponding phrases in the parallel line, *the word of Jehovah*. **Out of Zion, etc.:** This means that the world, especially the Gentile world, was to receive instruction from Jerusalem as a center. The image is that of a stream issuing forth from Jerusalem and watering the whole world. This Jesus and his apostles taught concerning Christianity. Repentance and remission of sins was to be preached among all nations, be-

from Jerusalem; 3 and he will judge between many peoples, and will decide concerning strong nations afar off: and they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning-hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. 4 But they shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree; and none shall make them afraid: for the mouth of Jehovah of hosts hath spoken it. 5 For all the peoples walk every one in the name of his god: and we will walk in the name of Jeho-

vah our God for ever and ever.

6 In that day, saith Jehovah, will I assemble that which is lame, and I will gather that which is driven away, and that which I have afflicted; 7 and I will make that which was lame a remnant, and that which was cast far off a strong nation: and Jehovah will reign over them in mount Zion from henceforth even for ever. 8 And thou, O tower of the flock, the hill of the daughter of Zion, unto thee shall it come, yea, the former dominion shall come, the kingdom of the daughter of Jerusalem.

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ginning at Jerusalem (Luke 24:47). "The law of the gospel and the word of the apostles, beginning from Jerusalem, as from a fountain, ran through the whole world, watering those who approached with faith." (Theodoret.)

3. He will judge, etc.: Jehovah is here represented as acting in the capacity of judge or arbiter in the disputes of nations. This is the preliminary of universal peace. Strong nations afar off: The nations over which God was to sit as judge were not to be ordinary nations, but mighty ones that come from remote distances, such as those mighty nations which have oppressed Israel and Judah. They shall beat, etc.: This is a picture of universal peace. Those of that age understood that it is permanent, for they destroy the weapons of war. Compare the opposite picture, Joel 3:10.

4. In this verse we are told of the consequences of peace. They are plenty and safety. Vine and fig tree: Conspicuous features of every garden of Palestine. They provided both food and shade, and were so easily grown that they were accessible to the poor. For the mouth of Jehovah of hosts hath spoken it: This is the prophet's confirmation of that which he has affirmed. If God has spoken it, it will come to pass, though it may

seem incredible. God's promise is one of the *two immutable* things of which the author of Hebrews speaks (6:18).

5. All the people walk . . . we will walk: The authorized version translated both of these verbs as futures. The revisers make one present and the other future. They both belong to the same verbal form, one which denotes habitual action rather than future time. The Gentile people were at the time of the prophet continuously walking in the ways of, that is, serving, other gods. He and his people, however, should, in the same continuous manner, serve Jehovah. It is a contrast between present conditions among the Gentiles and present and future ones among the chosen people.

6. Here begins a new paragraph, though the same topic is continued. In that day: The same time as the latter days (v. 1). I will assemble, etc.: The imagery is based upon the return from the Captivity. The lame, the outcast and the afflicted are names for the children of Israel. Cf. Zeph. 3:19.

7. That which was lame a remnant: This is a word of hope and not of discouragement. It is only a remnant, it is true, but a remnant with hope, and in time it will grow into a strong nation. Here Micah shares Isaiah's favorite doctrine that a remnant shall return.

8. Verses 6 and 7 add healing and deliverance for Israel to the previous promise of peace. This one promises them sovereignty. It is really a part of the paragraph, which extends to the close of the chapter. **Tower of the flock:** Jerusalem. The imagery is taken from

pastoral life. **The former dominion:** The rule of the Davidic line, which was to be interrupted by the Captivity. Other prophets shared in this hope (Is. 11:1; Jer. 23:5; 33:15-17; Zech. 3:8). The New Testament writers find its fulfillment in Christ's reign (Luke 1:32-33).

COMMENTS.

A Picture of Ideal Times. Micah like every other Hebrew prophet, was a firm believer in God and in the final triumph of righteousness through the manifestation of his power. God is not merely one who is righteous, but he does righteousness. The Judge of all the earth *will do right*. Since he was all-powerful and wrought constantly to promote righteousness, it follows inevitably that the eternal principle of justice, holiness and truth must ultimately prevail, and somewhere in the future there must be a time when evil will be banished and life will enjoy to its full the fruitage of perfect good and perfect peace. The injustice and oppression, the debauchery and sensuality which filled the land in Micah's day were antagonistic to, and retarded the coming of, this Golden Age. Therefore Micah denounced these, and as an incentive to right living he gave this picture of the glorious future time when God and right would be supreme. It is but one of many pictures given by the prophets of that age.

Its Description is Colored by the Times. Every man in giving a picture of ideal conditions must borrow his terms from his experience and from the times in which he lives. His ideal time will consist of an increase of those things in which he has pleasure and an absence of those things which cause him pain. When the prophets described the ideal age their picture was shaped and colored by the circumstances amid which they lived. Hence no two saw it exactly alike. When Israel was in foreign bondage, or when this fate was impending, the picture of the ideal age consisted in a return to

their beloved land amid manifold tokens of divine favor. This picture is given by Isaiah and others. When Israel was crushed by foreign foes till all else but hope was gone, can we wonder that the prophets pictured the age as one in which the armies of Israel should crush their enemies? One circumstance which colored Micah's picture was this: He believed that Jehovah was God over all the earth; the principles of his rule were the principles of universal righteousness. Israel and Judah were his chosen people, and through them he was to rule. His conception of the ideal age would be one in which all of these truths should come into their own. The very weakness of his native country, as it was then, perplexed him. Zion had no influence on surrounding nations. But in the latter days her influence will be as great as the promise of God, and the nations will honor her and learn of her God. Jehovah's house shall stand above all mountains; nations shall gather to it, and be shall judge among the nations.

It Shall Also be an Age of Peace. Another circumstance which helped Micah to shape his conception of the perfect age to come was the fact that his land was suffering the evils of war. Internally the nation was suffering practical anarchy. The rich oppressed the people (2:2); they were thrusting defenseless women from their homes (2:9); the practices of their rulers were such that he describes them as cannibals (3:1-3), and they were building up Zion with blood (3:10). But this was not all which disturbed the peace of Micah's time. The Assyrian was coming. Every summer

there marched across the plain beneath his home armies of Egyptians or armies of Assyrians. Embassies to arrange treaties and to plan defensive wars hurried by his dwelling place. Micah was "full of power by the spirit of Jehovah" (3:8), and he saw clearly the issue of all this. Zion should be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem become heaps (3:12). The sufferings which this should involve made the prophet fairly wall with grief for his people (1:8). Under these circumstances he pictures the future age as one of peace. All nations shall serve one God; they shall recognize Zion as their capital; Jehovah shall be their arbiter and shall justly decide all of their disputes. Hence there follows the delightful picture of nations converting swords and spears into plowshares and pruning-hooks, and learning war no more. Instead of strife and war there shall be peaceful home-life and tranquil minds. It seems too good to be true. But it is all based upon the power and purpose of God and will come to pass, says Micah, "for the mouth of Jehovah of hosts hath spoken it."

The Delightful Time is Not Yet: The Christian writers of the first four or five centuries of the Christian era made the

argument in favor of their faith that this prophecy was being fulfilled in their time. Athanasius said that on becoming Christians, Greeks and Barbarians "laid aside their savage slaughter, and now think no more of things of war, for now all peace and friendship are alone their minds' delight." Chrysostom declared that "now most of the world is in peace"; nations have forgotten "how to take in hand any affair of war"; and the whole earth learns of "war only by hearsay." Cyril and Theodoret argue similarly. The history of the world during the centuries since these fathers has had so frequently to tell of war between Christian powers that we may no longer be as confident that we are hastening into the age of universal peace. Micah's picture is not an approximation of the Christian age, but our age is rather, let us hope, an approximation of his picture. We possess all of the elements which are necessary to make his picture a reality. We believe in the same God, and his arm has not been shortened. To us has been left by Micah and other servants of God the legacy of an eternal hope and an endless struggle to bring forward the day when nations shall learn war no more.

THE LESSON STORY.

Against the dark background of war the prophet has painted his marvelous picture of universal peace. Micah lived at Mareshah, between the mountains of Judah and the Maritime Plain, in the days of Jotham, Ahaz and Hezekiah. He prophesied during the period when Egypt and Assyria were engaged in a desperate struggle, the one against the other, when Samaria was nearing its downfall and when Jerusalem stood terrified before the threatening hosts of Assyria. From his home, on the main road between Asia and Egypt, he could see the embassies sent out from Jerusalem to Egypt passing by, and also the great armies of Egypt and Assyria as they marched along this military highway. The whole land

was filled with wars and rumors of wars. Yet to the faithful and clear-visioned prophets the days were never so dark as to shut out all rays of light and hope. So in this time of deepest gloom God granted to his prophet Micah the glorious vision of far-distant but universal peace. One would naturally expect certain external signs of the coming blessing. But, on the other hand, it was apprehended through faith—faith in God, in his goodness and in his promises. Even as there was to come into the world a universal Saviour, so the prophet saw that he would bring in his train the promised peace. The story of this universal peace is the story of universal love. It is the story of Love coming from heaven to introduce

among men the reign of righteousness, through which alone can be ushered in the reign of peace. The vision of Micah should be an inspiration to labor for the extension of the kingdom of the Prince of Peace.

We may not stay to see the day
When the great Saviour shall bear sway
And earth shall glitter in the ray

That cometh from above.
But come it fast, or come it slow,
'Twill come at last we surely know,
And heaven and earth shall feel the glow,
And men shall call it Love.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. By what parable does Isaiah, in our last lesson, represent Israel?
2. What was God's relation to the vineyard, and what had he done for it?
3. What, in view of his efforts, had he a right to expect of his vineyard?
4. What did he see after all his labor and deep interest in it?
5. What, therefore, did he say he

would do with his vineyard?

6. By what figure, particularly, was Judah designated in the parable, and why?

7. What are the two causes for which the prophet pronounced the first two woes upon the people? Mark them as cardinal sins, common to-day as then.

8. Against what were the third, fourth and the fifth woes declared? Isa. 5:18-22.

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. Notwithstanding the errors and sins of Judaism in Micah's day, what bright promise was given? Micah 4:1.

2. What was to be "established," and where? Micah 4:1.

3. What was to be the action of the people with reference to it? Micah 4:1.

4. What beautiful national invitation was promised and specified? Micah 4:2.

5. Why was the invitation to be given, or for what great benefit? Micah 4:2.

6. What did the prophet say was to be the result of the teaching contemplated? Micah 4:2.

7. What particular place was foretold as the place from which the word of Jehovah should go forth? Micah 4:2.

8. Who, in the time foretold, was to judge among the many peoples and decide concerning strong nations? Micah 4:3.

9. What gracious result was prophesied? Micah 4:3.

10. What is the significance of "plow-

shares" and "pruning-hooks" in this connection? Micah 4:3.

11. What is the significance, also, of sitting every man under his own vine and under his own fig tree? Micah 4:4.

12. What was the prophet's certain guarantee of such a coming era? Micah 4:4.

13. What happy conversion and steadfastness were prophesied here? Micah 4:5.

14. What merciful and precious restoration was foretold? Micah 4:6.

15. What, too, will be the Lord's own relation to those restored? Micah 4:7.

16. What place and people were to be highly favored in the new spiritual order? Micah 4:8.

17. Has the prophecy yet reached its complete fulfillment?

18. What quality, or what attitude toward God, must necessarily precede the coming of universal peace on earth? Psa. 85:10 and Heb. 7:1-2.

Lesson X.

June 4.

ISRAEL'S PENITENCE AND GOD'S PARDON.

Hosea 14:1-9.

GOLDEN TEXT—Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger. Neh. 9:17.

Memory Verses—4-6. **Suggested Reading**—Hosea 11-14. **Time**—About 770 B. C.
Persons—Hosea and Israel.

DAILY READINGS.

May 29.... M—Hosea 14:1-9—Israel's Penitence and Pardon.
 May 30..... T—Hosea 6:1-11—Come and the Lord Will Hear Us.
 May 31..... W—Hosea 7:1-16—"Ephraim is a Cake not Turned."
 June 1..... T—Hosea 10:1-15—"It is Time to Seek the Lord."
 June 2..... F—Hosea 11:1-12—"When Israel was a Child, Then I loved Him."
 June 3..... S—Hosea 12:1-14—"Ephraim Feedeth Upon Wind."
 June 4..... S—Hosea 13:1-16—Israel's Destruction is that They are Against Me.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Lebanon. This lesson contains several allusions to Lebanon. By this we are not to understand the western range which is now called Lebanon, for it lies too far to the north to be seen from the Holy Land, but Hermon, the southern end of the Anti-Lebanon range. "Throughout Galilee Lebanon dominates the landscape. You can not lift your eyes from any spot of Northern Israel without resting them upon the vast mountain. From the unhealthy jungles of the Upper Jordan, the pilgrim lifts his heart to the cool hill air above, to the ever-green cedars and firs, to the streams and waterfalls that drop like silver chains off the great breastplate of snow. From Esdraelon and every plain the peasants look to Lebanon to store the clouds and scatter the rain; it is not from heaven but from Hermon that they expect the dew, their only hope in the long drought of summer. Across Galilee and in Northern Ephraim, across Bashan and in Northern Gilead, across Hauran and on the borders of the desert, the mountain casts its spell of power, its lavish promise of life. Lebanon is everywhere the summit of the land, and there are

points from which it is as dominant as heaven." (G. A. Smith.)

The Prop'net Hosea. Hosea was a prophet of the northern kingdom, though he may, like Amos, have lived in Judah. The place of his birth and the name of his home town are alike unknown to us. His date is given by the title of his book. His prophetic activity extended from the time of Uzziah to Hezekiah. He was a little later in time than Amos, and slightly earlier than Isaiah and Micah. Of his personal life we know little, except what may be gleaned from the first three chapters. From these we learn that he married a woman named Gomer, the daughter of Diblaim. To her were born three children, to whom the prophet gave symbolic names. But Gomer was unfaithful, and two of these children the prophet felt sure were not his own. At length Gomer left him, and his own heart grew bitter against her. Gomer hastened rapidly along that certain path of such a life; she was sold into slavery, and the prophet, out of pity, purchased her, not to be his wife, but in the hope that she had been disciplined and might be reformed. These are the bare outlines of the story told

without emotion or the adornment of imagination. It is a dark and somber tale that is not clear in all of its details, and which is yet, in spite of its obscurity, sufficiently plain to mark the path along which Hosea toiled with a breaking heart. Interpreters have differed as to whether this was a chapter out of the prophet's own life or is a parable. The writer does not hesitate to regard it as an actual experience of the prophet Hosea, and one moreover which was the basis of his own profound sympathy with God's love for sinning men. Out of the ruins of Hosea's shattered life and broken heart there sprang up a plant of fairer growth, one whose beauty and fragrance were destined to immortalize the prophet, and through him to teach all ages the mighty truth of God's infinite grace. God's choice of Israel had often been represented as a marriage, and, taught by his own life's sorrow, he understood as no other Israelite seems to have under-

stood, the nature and the love of God. Through all the many centuries of Israel's sinful career, God's love had followed and sought the welfare of his erring bride. This, moreover, was God's purpose for the future. "Therefore, behold I will allure her and bring her into the wilderness and speak comfortably unto her. And I will give her her vineyards from thence, and the valley of Achor for a door of hope; and she shall make answer there as in the days of her youth, and as in the day when she came up out of the land of Egypt" (2:14, 15). On that very spot that was hallowed by their first pledge of love, and in the very words of tender endearment by which they first wooed each other, God would seek to win again the love of his sin-stained and faithless bride, the people of Israel. This is the very heart of Hosea's gospel. In our lesson this wonderful truth is given to us, as it is in fact in every one of the fourteen chapters which compose his book.

THE HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

Not since the days of Elisha has the history of Israel furnished us a lesson. Jehu was the last ruler of the kingdom mentioned. He was succeeded by his son, and he in turn by Jehu's grandson; but their reigns were conspicuous for weakness rather than for brilliant achievement or material success. The fourth king of the dynasty of Jehu was Jeroboam II, whose reign was long and prosperous. His period was in fact the evening glow of Israel's history. His weak son, Zechariah, was slain within six months of his accession, but his murderer, Shallum, enjoyed the fruit of his crime but six months only, when he, too, was slain by Menahem. He reigned ten years, but during that time the land suffered an invasion by the Assyrians, and the heavy tax which Menahem imposed to pay the tribute produced such discontent that his son Pekahiah, after the reign of a year,

was slain and the throne seized by the leader of a wild robber band from Gilead. So it was that the nation traveled the way of murder and anarchy and hastened toward its final doom. Hosea's life lies just before and within this period of anarchy. His prophetic career began before the end of Jeroboam's reign. The latter part of his book was written somewhere within the period of social upheaval which has been described. He frequently refers to murder, highway robbery and pillaging. His age, he tells us, was one in which there is "nought but swearing and breaking faith and killing and stealing and committing adultery; they break forth, and blood touches blood." Throughout the land there is a very carnival of crime. "The thief entereth in and the troop of robbers spoileth without." Again he says, "The revolvers are gone deep in making slaughter." He

1 O Israel, return unto Jehovah thy God; for thou hast fallen by thine iniquity. 2 Take with you words, and return unto Jehovah: say unto him, Take away all iniquity, and accept that which is good: so will we render as bullocks

the offering of our lips. 3 Assyria shall not save us; we will not ride upon horses; neither will we say any more to the work of our hands, Ye are our gods; for in thee the fatherless findeth mercy.

tells of a company of priests on the road to Shechem that, "As troops of robbers wait for a man, so they murder on the way." It is a most unlovely picture. The

hands of the dial point to the sunset of Israel's career as a nation, and that sunset is framed in a sky lurid with blood, murder and unfaithfulness.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 1. Israel: In his denunciation of their sins Hosea calls the nation by its current names, Ephraim (12:1, 8, 14; 12:1, 12) or Samaria (13:16); but when he turns to entreaty, he calls them by the name of acceptance which had been given their forefather Jacob, "O Israel." **Return,** etc.: The former chapter has given a picture of "overwhelming, indiscriminating destruction" which is to befall Samaria. It would seem that there is no hope; but no, there is still a door of mercy, but it will be opened to the repentant only. "Great is repentance which maketh men reach even the very throne of glory." **For thou hast fallen by thine iniquity:** He points out the fact that Israel is already suffering as a result of its sins. This he urges as a reason for repentance.

2. Take with you words: "Do not take offerings and sacrifices. You have offered too many of these already, since they are mere forms with you." Hosea had already told them that they should search in vain for Jehovah with flocks and herds (5:6). He had declared that God desired mercy and not sacrifices; the knowledge of God rather than burnt offerings (6:6). Now he tells them to return, manifesting their repentance by words, not mere words, of course, but sincere, heartfelt speech. **Say unto him:**

These are the words which they are to bring to God. **Take away all iniquity:** In the original the emphatic word is *all*. Perfect cleansing must be desired. **Accept that which is good:** They are to ask God to remove the evil from them, but to accept them for the good that they had. **So will we render as bullocks,** etc.: Literally as in the authorized version, *So will we render the calves of our lips.* The idea is that just as they were to offer words instead of sacrifices for sin, so now they are to present thank offerings in the form of praises from their lips, instead of bullocks.

3. After renouncing their iniquities they now renounce those objects in which they have put confidence and which have kept them from putting trust in God. These are three, Assyria, Egypt and idols. **Assyria shall not save us:** It seems that Israel had at times actually looked to Assyria for aid. "When Ephraim saw his sickness . . . then went Ephraim to Assyria." (5:13). **We will not ride upon horses:** A reference to the cavalry of Egypt. Isaiah is continually denouncing a party in Jerusalem that trusted in Egypt. **Neither will we say any more,** etc.: We will not trust in idols and call them gods. **In thee the fatherless findeth mercy:** This is the distinctive message of Hosea, that God is a God of mercy.

4 I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for mine anger is turned away from him. 5 I will be as the dew unto Israel; he shall blossom as the lily, and cast forth his roots as Lebanon. 6 His branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive-tree, and his smell as Lebanon. 7 They that

dwell under his shadow shall return; they shall revive as the grain, and blossom as the vine: the scent thereof shall be as the wine of Lebanon. 8 Ephraim shall say, What have I to do any more with idols? I have answered, and will regard him: I am like a green fir-tree; from me is thy fruit found.

4. Here begins the reply which God will make whenever Israel returns in repentance. It extends to the end of verse 6. **Back-sliding:** This was Israel's besetting sin. Cf. 11:7. **I will love thee freely:** The adverb "freely" implies two things, (1) of God's own free will and (2) bountifully, abundantly. **Mine anger is turned away from him:** The singular pronoun, because Israel is thought of as an individual. One of the blessings of God's forgiveness was the withdrawal of his wrath. Cf. Ps. 85:2-3. But his wrath is no less a certainty than his love.

5. **I will be as the dew:** This is instead of the east wind threatened in 13:15. The dew was the only hope for moisture through the long drought of summer. No promise from God could mean more to them than this one. Cf. Ps. 72:6. **He shall blossom as the lily:** The lily was conspicuous for the rapidity of its growth and its great beauty. S. of Sol. 2:1-2; Matt. 6:28-29. **Cast forth his roots as Lebanon:** The older commentators thought that this refers to the cedars of Lebanon, but it is quite as likely that he here speaks of the mountain itself. The lower hills and spurs suggest great roots thrust deep into the earth. The figure teaches stability.

6. **His branches:** Here there is a comparison of Israel to a tree. **His beauty shall be as the olive tree:** The olive tree is evergreen and was regarded as a tree of great beauty (Ps. 52:8; 128:3). **His smell as Lebanon:** The lower parts of Mount Lebanon abound in aromatic

plants. "As you enter the valley (between Lebanon and Anti-Lebanon) straightway the scent meets you." (Theophrastus.)

7. With this verse there is a change of speaker. The prophet now speaks. **His shadow:** The "shadow of the Almighty." Here Jehovah is compared to a tree. **Shall return:** Be restored from captivity. **Blossom as the vine:** The meaning probably is that they shall flourish like the vine. The flower of the grape is not conspicuous, but the vine is praised for its fruitfulness (Ps. 128:3). **The wine of Lebanon:** "On this mountain are very valuable vineyards, in which the most excellent wine is produced, such as I have never drunk in any country, though in the course of fourteen years I have traveled through many and tasted many good wines." (Von Troil.)

8. There is another change in the speaker. Jehovah now speaks. The reading of the margin should be adopted, "O Ephraim, what," etc. This is exactly according to the original. **What have I to do any more with idols?** "Why are idols joined with me in worship?" says Jehovah. **I have answered,** etc.: "Am not I sufficient for you. Why then do you longer worship idols? I have in the past answered your prayers and will still show you regard." **I am like the evergreen fir tree:** God is like the evergreen tree in that he never has decay and is unfailing in blessing. **From me is thy fruit found:** Here God is compared to a fruit tree. He yields the fruit which Israel needs.

9 Who is wise, that he may understand these things? prudent, that he may know them? for the ways of Jehovah are right,

and the just shall walk in them; but transgressors shall fall therein.

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9. A summons to the readers of the book of Hosea to lay its message to heart. It is similar in its significance to the sentence frequently spoken by Jesus, "He that hath ears to hear let him

hear." He closes by affirming three truths: (1) The righteousness of Jehovah, (2) The safety in him for the righteous (3) His equally certain rejection of transgressors.

COMMENTS.

Hope to a Very Sinful People. To some scholars it has seemed impossible that Hosea, after proclaiming such utter doom to Samaria as is pronounced in the closing verses of the 13th chapter, should immediately after pass into such a tender message of hope. But Israel in those dark days of anarchy and lawlessness was in sore need of comfort and hope. Hosea was an Israelite indeed, and every passion that stirred the souls of his countrymen, every feeling of hope or despair which they felt, agitated him. That punishment is coming to the sinful he is certain, but with a hope that is born of a vision of divine love, he clings to the trust that Israel may yet gather the fruitage of repentance. He thinks of the coming Captivity and suffering as discipline, and the vision of God's love woos him on to the hope of Israel's repentance and restoration. Hosea sympathized with God's offended righteousness, but he sympathized also with man. He knew his frailties. He was a forerunner of Him "who hath been touched with a feeling of our infirmities." In the small book of Hosea, Grace and Truth—like that which came through Jesus Christ—are clearer and more articulate than anywhere else in the Old Testament.

The Two Points in Hosea's Message.—Through this and the preceding chapters run two great truths, and they are the center and core of Hosea's message. The first is the awful sin and the guilt of the people God has loved. That sin

is "backsliding" against the tenderest, truest affection that earth has known. The second is that, hard as this love has been strained and tried, the fountain has not run dry, but is as exhaustless as ever.

The Limitation of Love.—Hosea teaches his people the knowledge of God. To know God is to know his goodness. The goodness of God leads to repentance. He then proclaims the possibility and blessedness of this. His message of repentance is a message of cheer to Israel, sunken in despair because of its sin. God urges them to "sow to yourselves in righteousness; reap in mercy; break up your fallow ground, for it is time to seek the Lord till he come and rain righteousness upon you." Out of the mingling of the two truths comes Hosea's doctrine of doom, a doom which is inexorable and inevitable. This doom never comes till the last effort of divine love is exhausted, but the awful truth is that God's love may be baffled and defeated. Love is the mightiest thing in the world; it formed the universe, it redeemed man. But there is a limitation to the power of love, and when once that limitation of its strength is reached, love is more helpless than all earthly things. Mother's love will do anything for her child, but when the child in sickness has passed beyond the reach of love to give it aid, that very love renders the mother the weakest of the children of earth. And when the couch of pain has become

a bier, the helplessness and misery are greater because of love. But it is possible for grief to know greater pain than this. When the child has sinned and brings his impure soul back into the home of his childhood, it is the very despair of love that all of a father's care and a mother's tears are unavailing. No love of earth can save a lost soul. It may appeal to such a soul, but all of love's power becomes unavailing. So is it with God's love. Mighty as it is and potent as it is, even divine love can not work out its purpose without man's co-operation. The book of Hosea is studded with gems of thought which contrast God's love and man's callousness. "I have redeemed them, yet they have spoken lies against me." "When Israel was a child, then I loved him . . . but they sacrificed to Baalim." "I taught Israel to walk, but they knew not that I healed them." God's love is helpless before the continued sin of Israel. It wrings the prophet's heart to tell it, but it is true

that God's love was resisted, and for such Hosea sees doom as inexorable and as certain as any proclaimed by Amos. The love of God was to lift men to heaven, but when resisted and trampled under feet, the issue is inevitable. It must lead to hell. This is what makes the doctrine of a hell a necessity. We must believe in a hell because we believe in the love of God and in the bitter rejection by men of this love. This is a hell into which God banishes no man of his own will and pleasure, but into which men cast themselves as the one place where they may escape from God's love. Jesus used one word to describe this state. It is the word *without*—without the pale of God's love, and therefore banished from his presence forever. Hosea, in his message of love, never is able to get far from the awful counterpart of God's grace, namely, that this love can not rescue a soul that resists it. The just shall walk in the ways of Jehovah, but transgressors shall fall therein.

LESSON STORY.

The prophecy of Hosea is unique, but deeply tender. God through his prophets and apostles uses many parables and pictures of discipline and mercy.

[This lesson is called "Israel's Penitence and God's Pardon," but a careful study of the whole book of Hosea fails to exhibit the commendable penitence which God sought to awaken. It is therefore not the actual penitence, so necessary in order to the enjoyment of God's mercy, that we find in this prophecy, but rather God's call upon the nation to be wise and repent; and, along with the call, strong and wise motives to repentance and hope.]

This prophecy of Hosea is unrivaled in the tenderness of its appeal. It unfolds the "goodness of God" that would lead men to repentance. It is not for sacrifice or formal profession of faith God reasons and pleads, but for repentance, internal, intense, genuine and as compre-

hensive as the malady. The picture of God's love is of the deepest color. In other places in the Scripture the Lord has represented himself as a tender Shepherd, a great Physician, a gracious Father, as an eagle stirring up its nest and bearing its young upon its strong wings in training them to fly; as the mother hen sheltering her brood and warming them with her feathers; but here he has presented himself as a faithful, patient, loving, long-suffering husband, bearing graciously with a selfish, worldly, false and headstrong wife. She has gone astray after idolatrous lovers; she has been vain and untrue. Again and again she has run away from the God that gave her her food, her raiment, her prosperity and her hope. She has been unspeakably ungrateful; has forgotten him to whom she owes every comfort and delight.

The Lord has a controversy with his bride. In the nation, which he espoused,

there is no truth, no goodness and no knowledge of God. There is nought but swearing—making covenant—and breaking faith; killing, adultery, and overflowing cruelty. The Lord testifies: "There is none among them that calleth unto me."

The prophet himself—like many another true prophet of God—was a great sufferer. In his own family he felt the bitterness of a false, wicked, hardened wife. Having suffered on account of the baseness, degeneracy and terrible moral blindness of his own spouse, and yet loving her with an intense and unquenchable devotion, he knew not how to reject her or give her up. He remonstrated with her. He sought to convince her that poverty, sorrow upon sorrow and helplessness would succeed her mad folly and unfaithfulness. All that a faithful, generous husband could do to reclaim a wicked, stubborn and desperately foolish wife, he did for her reclamation. He put her away that she might learn her dependence upon him, and in her repentance might be taken back. So had God dealt with Israel. His love for Israel was deeper than the seas. It was higher than

the heavens. It was as lasting as eternity. She was breaking his heart by her treacheries and folly. She was cruel in her sins and yet insensible to those sins.

But in spite of all her strayings, backslidings and perverted loves, he would grant her a door of hope. Even the valley of Achor, dark with the memory of Achan's covetousness, should become to her a house of joy and redemption. There should yet be unity among the people of God. They might be carried away to Assyria; might suffer the sorest and most distressing captivity; might see the fair plains of their once prosperous country devastated, their hills stripped of every grove and idolatrous shrine, and their palaces deserted; they might be harrowed by necessary chastisements; but God, the loving husband, would, withal, bring them back to himself in infinite mercy. He would permit the storms to fall, even as dogs are sent afar after straying sheep, to bring them back. He would still be himself, as the dew to Israel. Verily, "the mercy of the Lord endureth forever." But what of those who still resist, treading under foot the love of God? Woe be to those whom it is impossible to renew to repentance.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What is said of Christ as our peace by the Apostle Paul? Eph. 2:14.
2. What great promise of rest does Jesus make to the weary? Matt. 11:28.
3. Why did Jesus say he had spoken his farewell words to his disciples? John 16:33.
4. What great treasure did Jesus leave with and give to his disciples as he went to Calvary? John 16:27.
5. This universal peace prophesied in our last lesson shall be brought about

only in what way?

6. Why do nations go to war against nations?
7. How would the universal and full acceptance of the gospel prevent war?
8. What is the best way by which we may advance the reign of peace and good will?
9. Does Jesus' coming among sinners at first produce peace? Luke 12:51.
10. What kind of peace only is satisfying and abiding? John 14:27.

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSONS WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. What kind of a being is God according to the Golden Text?
2. What is Israel called upon in this lesson to do and why? Hosea 14:1.

3. What special kind of an offering were they invited to bring? Hosea 14:2.
4. What prayer were they to offer, and in what spirit? Hosea 14:2.

5. Was it only lip-service or whole-hearted surrender Hosea urged? Hosea 14:2.

6. Why were they to say Assyria can not save us? Hosea 14:3.

7. What was the significance of saying they would not ride on horses? Hosea 14:3; Ps. 20:7. Note also that the Jews were wont to trust in Egyptian horses.

8. What did it imply for them to say that they would not trust in the work of their own hands? Hosea 14:3.

9. Why this reference in this connection to the fatherless as finding mercy? Hosea 14:3.

10. What two things does God offer to returning backsliders? Hosea 14:4.

11. What very beautiful figure does the Lord use to show his refreshing tenderness and vitalizing grace? Hosea 14:5.

12. What two gracious promises does the Lord make in Hosea 14:5?

13. What three promises does he offer in Hosea 14:6?

14. What four blessings are proffered in Hosea 14:7?

15. What was to be Ephraim's question? Hosea 14:8.

16. The deep sorrows and the vanities of idolatry felt and seen in the Captivity cured the Jewish nation of idolatry.

17. What quality of mind and heart is necessary in order to understand God and his promises? Hosea 14:9.

18. What is wisdom in the Bible sense of the word? Matt. 7:24-27.

19. Since those herein addressed had gone away from God, what was absolutely necessary in order to obtain mercy? Hosea 14:11.

20. Quote or read one of the most merciful promises of the Old Testament. Isa. 55:7.

21. Find still another gracious declaration of mercy in Isaiah. Isa. 1:16-18.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT TEACHING.

1. God was the same in the patriarchal and Jewish dispensations as he is in the Christian, but it took Christ to reveal his fatherly love and compassion.

2. The starlight and moonlight of ancient dispensations could not warm the hearts of men like the Sun of Righteousness with healing in his wings.

3. Although the New Testament revelation presents God as an infinitely loving Father, yet he is often grieved because men will not come unto him and live. Jesus wept over wicked and blinded Jerusalem, but even his tears did not save it.

4. Such beautiful stories as those of the Prodigal Son, the Sinful Woman, the Lost Sheep, the Good Samaritan, Zacchaeus, and the Blind Beggar are peculiar to the New Testament. God's love revealed in the days of degenerate Israel and Judah would not have received the acceptance that it received under the apostles. Jonah was not ready to go to tell Nineveh

God's warning, because he did not know and share God's great love and compassion for sinners. Paul was ready.

5. Because God is infinitely loving, men sometimes abuse his love and grace. But nothing is more dangerous than to tread under foot the Son of God; and nothing is more fatal than to do despite the spirit of grace. If men will not believe him, repent of their sins and come to him for salvation, he can not save them. While with God all things are possible, yet away from and without God it is impossible to renew men to repentance. Uniting with God, training with him, all things are possible. Fighting, rejecting, neglecting him, nothing is possible with reference to salvation. All things are possible to him that believes.

6. The New Testament particularly impresses the necessity of receiving and of making known to others the merciful salvation in Christ for all who will obey him. "Go ye, therefore, into all the world and preach the gospel."

Lesson XI.

June 11.

HEZEKIAH'S GREAT PASSOVER.

2 Chron. 30. (Print 2 Chron. 30:13-27.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart. 1 Sam. 16:7.

Memory Verses—18-20. **Suggested Reading**—2 Chron. 29-31. **Time**—722 B. C. **Persons**—Hezekiah, the Priests, Levites and the assembled worshipers.

DAILY READINGS.

- June 5..... M—2 Chron 30:1-27—Hezekiah's Great Passover.
 June 6..... T—2 Chron. 29:1-19—The Neglected Temple Cleansed.
 June 7..... W—2 Chron. 29:20-30—Joyful Resuming of Worship.
 June 8..... T—2 Chron. 29:31-36—Consecrating Themselves Unto the Lord.
 June 9..... F—2 Chron 31:1-10—The Tithes for the Lord's House.
 June 10.... S—2 Chron. 31:11-21—The Service of the Lord's House Recognized.
 June 11.... S—2 Chron. 35:1-19—The Great Passover Under Josiah.

HISTORICAL.

The last king of Judah that has figured in our lessons was Uzziah, and in the year that he died Isaiah was called to be a prophet. His successor was Jotham, who, according to the biblical record, reigned sixteen years (2 Kings 15:33). A number of these must have been the years in which he acted as regent for his father, unless there is a corruption in the Assyrian records, which is not likely. In 742 B. C. their records mention Uzziah as a member of the Syrian league, and eight years later they relate that Ahaz made surrender to the Assyrian monarch. The years that Jotham ruled alone can not have been more than five or six. He is described as a good king, which means he fostered the worship of Jehovah. One political event of significance occurred during his reign. The Assyrian army was pressing heavily upon all the petty states that lay between the Euphrates and Egypt, and for mutual protection they united as confederates to jointly resist the approach of their common foe. Rezin, the king of Damascus, and Pekah, the king of Israel, acted to-

gether in this matter and attempted to induce Jotham to join them. The young prophet Isaiah gave advice against such a course, and Jotham refused to become a confederate. These kings accordingly attempted to coerce Jotham into the alliance, but during his lifetime their efforts were not successful. Death came to him, however, at this unfortunate crisis, and Ahaz, a mere youth of twenty years, came to the throne. He was inclined to heathen practices and was an imitator of foreign customs. Isaiah was not able to exert a decided influence for good over him. The war of Pekah and Rezin against Judah, that had commenced during the previous reign, was continued. They overran the rural parts of Judah, gained possession of many of its outposts and captured much booty and many prisoners. Jerusalem was too strong for them. Ahaz at length made appeal for assistance to the king of Assyria, who was always glad to profit by the quarrels of his petty foes. He accepted from Ahaz the silver and gold that were taken from the temple and the palace, and invaded Damascus, killing her king and carrying

her people into captivity. Here Ahaz went to visit him, and, anxious to imitate so powerful a king, he sent a copy of an altar which he saw in Damascus to Urijah the priest, and had one made for the temple in Jerusalem, and he himself sacrificed upon it when he returned (2 Kings 16:10-13). He made other changes in the temple arrangement and in its ritual, all of which teaches two lessons: First, that in imitation of the Assyrian monarch he attempted to dominate the worship of his capital, and, second, that he introduced sufficient idolatrous elements into the worship to justify the censure which the author of Kings utters against him. He was succeeded by Hezekiah. Religiously he was a good king, and politically he did, perhaps, as well as any ordinary man could have done under the circumstances. His capital was filled with intrigues and

conflicting factions, and it is not a matter of surprise that he did no better. To say that he did not make a brilliant success of his reign is equivalent to saying that he was not strong enough to cope with an herculean task. The sacred historian gives to him unstinted praise, however, for amid the factions, intrigues and turmoil of his times he sought and served Jehovah.

Hezekiah ascended the throne of Judah six years before the fall of Samaria (2 Kings 18:10). That unfortunate country had already suffered severely at the hand of the Assyrians (2 Kings 15:29), and the siege of the capital began during the fourth year of Hezekiah's reign. At the time of our lesson, therefore, circumstances were hastening towards the final collapse of the kingdom founded by Rehoboam.

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

According to the chronology given by the Chronicler, Hezekiah commenced the purification of the worship on the first day of the initial year of his reign (2 Chron. 29:3). We are not warranted in assuming that his reign began on the first day of the year, but it is probable that he had already been on the throne some weeks or months, but planned to commence the restoration of the worship on New Year's day. The temple was in a ruinous condition, since Ahaz had stripped it of its treasure and closed its doors. Eight days were spent in removing rubbish from the house and eight more days in purifying the porch and courts. Too much time had been consumed on this work to permit of the celebration of the Passover on

the regular day, the fourteenth day of the first month. It was decided by a council of the rulers that rather than postpone it altogether it should be observed one month late. The effort was made to have this feast as a truly national observance, such as had been observed since the days of Solomon. Invitations were sent not only to Judah, but to the northern kingdom as well. They were invoked in the name of the God of the Patriarchs to abandon idolatry and turn to the worship of their God. The land was too distracted, however, and the hearts of its people too callous to heed the invitation. Most of Israel disregarded it, but a few came, and from Judah a great multitude.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 13. The feast of unleavened bread: There were two feasts kept at this time. The first was the feast of the Passover. It was a single meal eaten in the evening—or as the Hebrew literally ex-

presses it, "Between the evenings," that is, probably it commenced before the sun set, but was prolonged till into the night of the fourteenth (the fifteenth according to Jewish count) day of the first month.

13 And there assembled at Jerusalem much people to keep the feast of unleavened bread in the second month, a very great assembly. **14** And they arose and took away the altars that were in Jerusalem, and all the altars for incense took they away, and cast them into the brook Kedron. **15** Then they killed the

passover on the fourteenth *day* of the second month: and the priests and the Levites were ashamed, and sanctified themselves, and brought burnt-offerings into the house of Jehovah. **16** And they stood in their place after their order, according to the law of Moses the man of God: the priests sprinkled the blood

An ancient month was actually a moon, the period from new moon to new moon, and the fourteenth day was exactly a fortnight after the new moon appeared. It was therefore always coincident in time with the full moon. The second feast was that of unleavened bread. This commenced on the morning following the observance of the Passover, that is, the fifteenth day of the month, and continued till the twenty-second. Since unleavened bread was eaten also at the Passover feast, and all leaven had to be removed from the house before the feast commenced, the day on which the Passover lamb was killed and eaten came to be known as the first day of unleavened bread. It is called by that name in the New Testament. Hence sometimes, as in this passage, that name was applied to the entire period of observance. On the other hand, since the Passover feast was the initial act of the eight days' celebration, sometimes that name is applied to the whole period. This chapter offers instances of both these usages, and it shows how it is that John can call the feast of unleavened bread proper by the name Passover (John 18:28; 19:14). For the law of the Passover see Ex. 12. **The second month:** The king and his advisers decided to observe the feast on this month instead of the first. The law permitted this in the case of those who, at the regular time, were unclean or absent (Num. 9:9-12). They decided to avail themselves of this exception for the entire nation.

14. The altars: These were idolatrous altars which Ahaz had placed in every corner of Jerusalem (2 Chron. 28:24). They were of two kinds, one for the burning of victims and the other for incense. Hezekiah did the construction work of restoring the worship of Jehovah before he did destructive work of tearing down the idolatrous altars. **Into the brook Kedron:** The usual depository of all unclean objects (29:16; 1 Kings 15:13; 2 Kings 23:12).

15. They killed the passover: The word "passover" may mean the lamb, the feast of one meal, or the feast of eight days (see note on v. 13). Here it has the first of these meanings. **The priests and Levites were ashamed:** They were ashamed of their laggard actions and neglect (See 29:34 and 30:3). Their shame led them to repentance. **Brought burnt offerings into the house of Jehovah:** Not into the temple building, but into the court of the priest, where was the altar of burnt offering.

16. In their place after their order: This shows that custom had established the place and rank of each priest. The written law does not specify this, but the Mishna, part of the traditions which were so prominent in the time of Jesus, gave minute directions about the arrangement of the priests and the conduct of the worship. **The priests sprinkled the blood:** This was an essential part of every sacrifice of a victim (Lev. 1:5, 11, 15; 3:28, 13, etc.).

which they received of the hand of the Levites. 17 For there were many in the assembly that had not sanctified themselves: therefore the Levites had the charge of killing the passovers for every one that was not clean, to sanctify them unto Jehovah. 18 For a multitude of the people, even many of Ephraim and Manasseh, Issachar and Zebulun, had not cleansed themselves, yet did they eat the passover otherwise than it is written. For Hezekiah had prayed for them, saying, The good Jehovah pardon every one 19 that setteth his heart to seek God, Jehovah, the God of his fathers, though he be not cleansed according to the purification of the sanctuary. 20 And Jehovah hearkened to Hezekiah, and healed the people. 21 And the children of Israel that were present at Jerusalem kept the

feast of unleavened bread seven days with great gladness; and the Levites and the priests praised Jehovah day by day, singing with loud instruments unto Jehovah. 22 And Hezekiah spake comfortably unto all the Levites that had good understanding in the service of Jehovah. So they did eat throughout the feast for the seven days, offering sacrifices of peace-offerings, and making confession to Jehovah, the God of their fathers.

23 And the whole assembly took counsel to keep other seven days; and they kept other seven days with gladness. 24 For Hezekiah king of Judah did give to the assembly for offerings a thousand bullocks and seven thousand sheep; and the princes gave to the assembly a thousand bullocks and ten thousand sheep: and a great number of priests sanctified

17. For there were many, etc.: This verse gives the reason for the unusual procedure described in the last verse, of the priests receiving the blood from the Levites, rather than the offerers themselves. Since they were unclean, the Levites officiated for them.

18. For a multitude: This verse explains how it was that many were still unclean, though it was a month later than the usual Passover. They were Israelites, who, from long absence from the Passover, had forgotten the strict regulations about purification. The good Jehovah pardon, etc.: Hezekiah regarded the Passover as a privilege, and from it he wished none to be barred. He believed that the strict letter of the law might be waived to bring this about.

20. Jehovah . . . healed the people: How this was known, the chronicler does not tell. In some cases such information was communicated to the kings by prophets (2 Kings 19:20).

21. Seven days: This was the usual term required in the law. Loud instru-

ments: Instruments that gave loud praise to Jehovah.

22. Hezekiah spoke comfortably, etc.: Certain of the Levites were expert in the knowledge which enabled them to conduct the worship satisfactorily. These Hezekiah praised and encouraged. So they did eat throughout the feast, etc.: The thought which is here expressed is that the Levites did not become weary and shirk their duty. Making confession: The margin correctly expresses the idea "giving thanks."

23. Took counsel: Resolved. Other seven days: This was a voluntary addition to the law's requirement, and shows their great zeal.

24. Hezekiah . . . and the princes gave to the assembly: The animals which the people brought with them would be exhausted during the first week; the king and princes supply them with victims for the second week of feasting. A great number of priests: More priests repented of their neglect and tardiness. Cf. v. 15.

themselves. 25 And all the assembly of Judah, with the priests and the Levites, and all the assembly that came out of Israel, and the sojourners that came out of the land of Israel, and that dwelt in Judah, rejoiced. 26 So there was great joy in Jerusalem; for since the time of

Solomon the son of David king of Israel there was not the like in Jerusalem. 27 Then the priests the Levites arose and blessed the people: and their voice was heard, and their prayer came up to his holy habitation, even unto heaven.

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25. Five classes are mentioned in this verse: (1) The Assembly of Judah. (2) The priests and Levites. These lived in Judah. (3) The assembly that came out of Israel (v. 11). (4) The sojourners. These were non-Israelites, who were now making their home in Israel or Judah and, so far as they could, participated in the worship.

26. Since the time of Solomon, etc.: The Passover had been kept many times since then, but not on so splendid a scale.

No such gathering is mentioned since the feast of tabernacle at the dedication of the temple (2 Chron. 7:9).

27. The priests the Levites: This phrase occurs elsewhere (Deut. 17:9, 18; Josh. 3:3; Jer. 23:18). It was one duty of the priest to pronounce the blessing (Num. 6:23), and the form of blessing that they were to use is given (Num. 6:24-26). The Levites had assisted the priests and had discharged some of the latter's duties.

COMMENTS.

"The personal character and endowment of Hezekiah were illustrious. Ready for war when necessary, and alike brave and skillful in its conduct, he was more inclined to the gentle arts of peace. Though he could wrest cities from the Philistines and defend Jerusalem with resolution and ability, he gave his heart rather to the promotion of the internal welfare of his kingdom. Fond of agriculture and pastoral pursuits, like his grandfather, Uzziah, he had great herds and flocks in the Negeb and elsewhere, and built shepherds' towers and large folds for their protection. Vineyards, oliveyards and cornfields were his delight. His tender religious sensibility and poetic genius—the first instance of the latter since David—are seen in the hymns which he composed after his recovery from almost mortal sickness. His love of culture displayed itself in his zeal for the preservation of the religious writings

of his nation, of which their literature, to a great extent, consisted. Descended, apparently on his mother's side, from Zechariah, the favorite prophet of Uzziah, he inherited a lofty enthusiasm for the ancient faith. In direct contrast to his father, who had zealously favored everything Assyrian, Hezekiah gave himself passionately to whatever was national, and devoted his life to the restoration of the worship of Jehovah and the purification of the land from the heathenism which Ahaz had introduced. The law was his guiding star in public and private. The prophets were his honored and cherished counsellors." (Geikie.)

The Purification of the Temple. "He threw open the gates of the temple in the first month of his reign, and began the repairs of the structure. Assembling the priests and Levites in the open space east of it, he enjoined them to commence its purification at once, and prepare it

for the restoration of the public services. The sacred lamps had been long extinguished, and neither incense nor burnt sacrifices had been offered, but all this must be reversed. The calamities of the nation, he told them, had been the punishment of such neglect; they must now be diligent to repair it. Having first purified their own persons, they zealously carried out the royal command, and in a fortnight had made the building fit for use. The 'uncleanness' found in it was carried down to the Kedron and scattered on the stream; the altar of burnt offering restored to its place, and all the temple vessels and furniture, which Ahaz had carried away, made ready for their respective purposes. "A sin offering for the kingdom, the temple, and the people was next offered by the priests, by Hezekiah's order; the choirs and instrumental bands of Levites standing in their old places and joining in the service; the trumpets sounding, and the singers and musicians filling the air once more with the words and music of the old psalms, the king and court united with the congregation in lowly worship. It was a worthy inauguration of a noble reign." (Geikie.)

The Description of the Passover. The Scriptures contain seven accounts of the observance of the Passover on special occasions, and this is the fourth. Of all of these observances more or less details are given. The first of all is the observance in Egypt (Ex. 12). The second was the first observance in the desert (Num. 9). The third was the one observed under the lead of Joshua at Gilgal after the circumcision of the people and when the manna ceased (Josh. 5). The fifth was the great feast of Josiah (2 Chron. 35). The sixth was in the time of Ezra (Ezra 6), and the seventh and last was that kept by our Lord.

Hezekiah's Generosity. The king showed commendable generosity in inviting the people of Israel to share in the celebra-

tion of this great national feast. Little in this history was calculated to incline him to such a course. Not since the time of Jehu had they been on friendly terms. During the reign of Ahaz a war had waged between the two lands, yet Hezekiah sent the invitation to the former enemy of his people. He was perhaps moved to this step by pity caused by the deplorable condition of that once vigorous kingdom. The invitation met with scornful ridicule on the part of most, but a few accepted, and Hezekiah must have felt himself rewarded for his pains.

The Irregularity in the Observance. In two respects Hezekiah departed from the strict letter of the law. He changed the time and he admitted to the feast some that were not ceremonially fit. The law consisted largely in external regulations. The chronicler rejoices in conformity to every jot and tittle of the law, yet in this case he relates that God approved of the change. The irregularity was overlooked, partly in response to Hezekiah's prayer, but because the people themselves came with the spirit of observance. They had it in mind to worship God and to turn away from their former evil practices. Since the intention was good, God accepted that instead of the actual conformity to all of the details of the law. This is a sound principle and in many circumstances of life should give us great comfort. It is possible, of course, to press it too far, as it has been many times, but neither the literalist nor the man who would nullify all positive commandments is correct. Our God is a God of reason as well as justice.

Great Joy in Jerusalem. In a number of verses in this chapter there is mention of the joy of the people in this observance. It is probable that the popular delight in these feasts is greatly underestimated. The religion of the Jews was not solemn nor devoid of those elements which gave pleasure, as Dr. Clifford has said: "I am not unmindful of

the assertion that the God of the Hebrews is usually thought of as a Being of preternatural severity, overwhelming men by his majesty, begetting profound and soul-filling awe by his greatness, dwelling in the thick darkness, making clouds his chariot, and sweeping down on his foes like a cyclone. But this representation is one-sided and unfair to a religion which

had more festivals than fasts, more psalms than prophecies, and more triumphs than despairs. By the side of intolerance of sin there is mercy that reacheth to the very heavens, and near to the righteousness that is like the great mountains there is a forgiveness that inspires hopeful petition, even out of depths of sufferings and misfortune."

THE LESSON STORY.

Hezekiah was one of the noblest princes of the house of David. He was the son of a bad father but a good mother, and it has been well said that "one good mother is worth a hundred school-masters." He also had, for his chief counsellor Isaiah the prophet, who, the Jewish Rabbis declare, was his tutor. He likewise had the opportunity of seeing the effects of his father's evil course upon the kingdom. Bad times afford at least the advantage of large opportunities. Truly has it been said,

"Of others' vices we may frame
A ladder, if we will but tread
Beneath our feet each deed of shame."

Hezekiah's father, Ahaz, had introduced the worst of idolatry among the people. "The worship of Moloch, the savage god of Ammon," had been established, not only on the heights of Olivet, but in the valley of Hinnom (or Gehenni), on a spot known by the name of Tophet, close under the walls of Jerusalem. There the brazen statue of the god was erected, with the furnace within or at his feet, into which even his own children were thrown. Superstition appeared in every part of the country. Gold and silver statues glittered throughout Judea. Soothsayers, spirits, ghosts were consulted (Isa. 2:6, 8, 20; 8:19)." (Stanley.) Also during the reign of this wicked king the doors of the temple had been closed; the offering of incense and the morning and evening sacrifice had been discon-

tinued, and the entire interior left to neglect and decay. The reign of Ahaz was disastrous as it had been wicked. Judah had endured repeatedly the horrors of invasion; her cities had been "burned with fire, and strangers devoured her land in her presence," so that the territory which remained to her was truly but a "very small remnant" (Isa. 1:7-9). It was under such unpromising conditions as these that the young king, Hezekiah, came to the throne. On the first New Year's Day (April) of his reign the king heroically began his reforms. His first undertaking was to prepare the long-neglected temple for worship. The great doors were thrown wide open, and the accumulated rubbish of years was gathered up and thrown in the Kedron valley near the city. When the work was done they reported to the king in his palace that they had "cleansed all the house of the Lord." It had taken sixteen days, so the cleansing must have been complete.

This was followed by the restoration of the temple service. The rulers, or "princes," now gathered together. Those who had been leaders in apostasy were now to be leaders in the great reformation. Then was made the sin offering; the blood sprinkled upon the altar being regarded as the very life, the most precious thing that one could offer, stood for the renewal of their covenant with Jehovah and the laying down of their lives upon his altar. After this came

the singing of David's psalms of praise, accompanied by a grand orchestra, and then burnt offerings to signify their consecration to Jehovah's service, and the full expiation of their sins was made. These offerings were not mere formal service, but expressions of heartfelt worship, and it was during the making of them that "the song of the Lord began." The worship was not only full of joy, but also full of reverence. The king and people did not simply bow the head, but "bowed" down, first upon their knees and then prostrated "themselves" and "worshiped" in humble adoration. As "one natural expression of true religious feelings is the desire to give," Hezekiah called on the people for free-will offerings, and the gifts were so generous that both king and people rejoiced greatly. The temple had now been cleaned and its worship restored; the people had renewed their covenant with Jehovah, and made glad and generous offerings, and experienced a deep revival of religion, but Hezekiah was not yet satisfied. His interests were too broad to be limited to the narrow confines of his little kingdom, so he wrote letters and sent messengers from city to city throughout the northern kingdom, urging the people to forsake their idols and return to the true God, and inviting them to come to a great religious festival in Jerusalem. This invitation to "Israel and all Judah," so freely given, was mocked at by some

and laughed to scorn by others. Yet it had its blessed results, for many from the tribes of "Asher, Manasseh and Zebulun humbled themselves and came to Jerusalem." Ephraim and Issachar also were represented in the great gathering, so that five out of the ten tribes responded to the gracious invitation. Hezekiah did not allow the holy enthusiasm of the great Passover feast to run to waste, but turned it to good account; for when it was over "all Israel that was present" went out to the cities of Judah and destroyed every vestige of idolatry; they broke down the groves, the high places, the images and the altars. The work of destruction did not end with Judah, but was extended far into the kingdom of Israel. So far-reaching and complete was Hezekiah's warfare against idols and idolatry that he broke in pieces the brazen serpent which Moses had made in the wilderness, because it had been degraded into an idol.

Having thus completely cleansed the land of idolatry, and having made glad and great offerings to Jehovah, the priests and Levites arose and blessed the people, and "there was great joy in Jerusalem." Because of his devotion to the true worship of Jehovah, and because in all that he did "he did it with all his heart," Hezekiah has been called the best of all kings of Judah (2 Kings 18:4). Truly "the Lord was with him, and he prospered whithersoever he went forth."

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What quality in God's character was especially emphasized in our last lesson?
2. By the tenderness and readiness to forgive on the part of Hosea toward his ungrateful wife what is illustrated on God's part toward his unfaithful children?
3. In what kind of an offering does God delight on the part of his children?

4. What is the significance of the figure God uses in saying he will be as the dew to Israel?

5. In order to obtain mercy and pardon from God what is necessary on the part of the backslider?

6. Give one or two passages from the Old Testament declaring God's willingness to pardon and receive those who diligently seek him?

7. Through whom do we obtain the fullest and truest revelation of the Father?

8. Explain in what respect it is the fullest and truest revelation.

9. What will become of those who harden their hearts against God's mercy and grace?

10. Wherein lies the danger of hearing and not doing God's will?

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. To whom did Hezekiah send and write that they should come to the feast at Jerusalem? 2 Chron. 30:1.

2. What the occasion, and what the purpose, of the royal call? Chron. 20:1.

3. What had the king done that is mentioned prior to the invitation? 30:2.

4. For what two reasons could the Passover not be kept at the proper time? 30:3.

5. What does the narrative indicate as to the custom of observing the Passover just preceding this time? 2 Chron. 30:5.

6. What was the message carried throughout Israel and Judah? 2 Chron. 30:6-9.

7. To what kings did Hezekiah refer in speaking of the remnant that had escaped? 2 Chron. 30:6.

8. Against whose example and punishment were the people warned in the letter? 2 Chron. 30:7.

9. Against what were they cautioned, especially to what exhorted and why, in 2 Chron. 30:8?

10. What did the king say the people should find, where come and why, if they would turn to the Lord? 2 Chron. 30:9.

11. How faithfully did the posts, or messengers, perform their task? 2 Chron. 30:10.

12. How was their message received in Israel? 2 Chron. 30:10.

13. What men, however, cheerfully obeyed the call? 2 Chron. 30:11.

14. What reception in Judah was accorded to the king's letter? 2 Chron. 30:12.

15. Was the attendance regarded as a great success? 2 Chron. 30:13.

16. What destructive work did the people perform at this time? 2 Chron. 30:14.

17. What is said concerning the priests and Levites on this occasion? 2 Chron. 30:15, 16.

18. Why were many people excused for not having ceremonially sanctified themselves at this time? 2 Chron. 30:17-20.

19. How long was the feast kept and in what spirit? 2 Chron. 30:21.

20. Why were the days of the feast doubled? 2 Chron. 30:23, 24.

21. What is said of the joy in Jerusalem, and of the prayer, at this time? 2 Chron. 30:26-27.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. The boldness of Hezekiah in sending out such a general invitation reminds one of the universality of the New Testament invitation. Is there not a general tendency to limit our message, service and expectation, when they should be wide as the world?

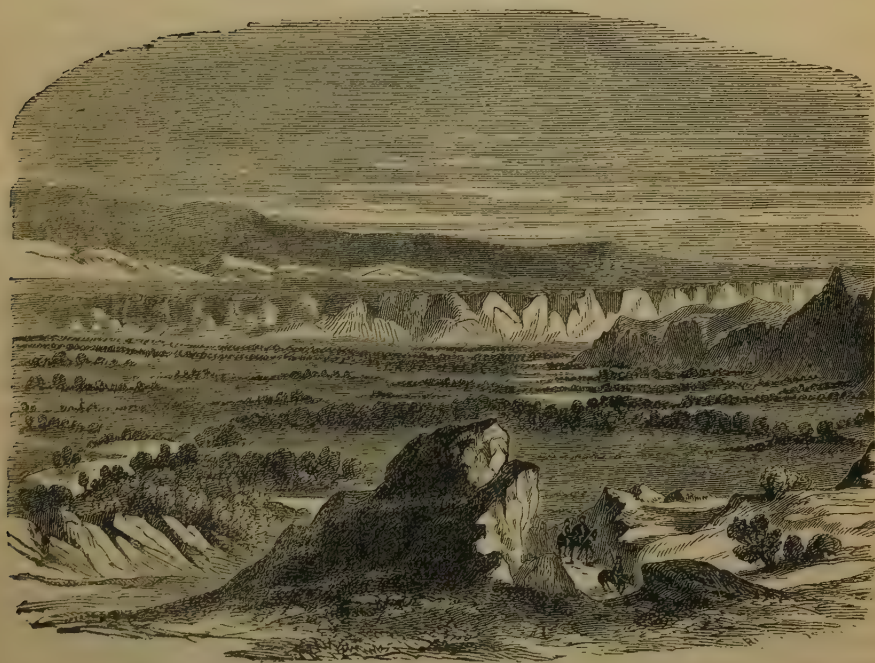
2. The Passover of the Jews represented Christ our Passover, slain for us. In him we find the Lamb of God that taketh away the sin of the world. The

Lord's Supper speaks in striking symbols of his sacrifice for us. In it we are to remember him—to feed upon his words, drink in his spirit, and show forth his death until he shall come again.

3. He knows how to have compassion on the ignorant and on them that are out of the way. It is not the ceremonial, but the spiritual, to which he especially looks in our worship and service. We will not neglect the formal and cere-

monial in our religion, but will seek to fill them to the brim with the wine of spiritual consecration. God looketh upon the heart. He seeks men to worship him in spirit and truth. A greater than Hezekiah invites us to the house

and worship of God and calls upon us to enter our closets and pray to our Father who seeth in secret and will reward us openly. He can save from captivity to Satan, from worldliness, from all calamity and from all sin.



VALLEY OF THE JORDAN.

THE DOWNFALL OF SAMARIA.

2 Kings 17:1-18.

GOLDEN TEXT—He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. Prov. 29:1.

Memory Verse—14. **Suggested Reading**—2 Kings 16-17. **Time**—718 B. C.
Persons—Hosea, Shalmaneser and Sargon, and the Children of Israel. **Places**—Samaria, Assyria, Halah, the Habor, the river of Gozan, and the cities of the Medes.

DAILY READINGS.

June 12.... M—2 Kings 17:1-18—The Downfall of Samaria.

June 13.... T—2 Kings 16:1-4; 2 Chron. 28:1-4—Ahaz's Devotion to Idolatry.

June 14.... W—2 Kings 16:5-9; 2 Chron. 28:16-21—The Help of Man that Proved a Delusion.

June 15.... T—2 Kings 16:10-20; 2 Chron. 28:22-27—The Help of God that Proved a Delusion.

June 16.... F—2 Kings 17:19-41—The People Brought in by the Assyrian King.

June 17.... S—Isaiah 7:1-25—Isaiah Giving a Sign to Ahaz.

June 18.... S—Isaiah 8:1-22—Isaiah Prophesying Israel's Captivity.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Samaria. See notes on lesson for January 22.

Assyria. The original Assyria is the region lying along the Tigris River north of its confluence with the lower Zab. It was south of the Armenian mountains and west of the Zagros range. This region is above the alluvial deposit of the lower Tigris and Euphrates and is rolling and mountainous. To the south of Assyria was the great kingdom of Babylon. These two powers were constant rivals, and one could attain to eminence only by the mastery of the other. At this period in our history Babylon was comparatively weak, and Assyria was strong. Babylon was not so weak, however, that Assyria had uncontested opportunity to carry on her campaigns. There were frequent uprisings in the south which hampered the advance of Assyria, but at length this obstacle was removed, and Assyria overflowed her original boundaries and spread over all Western Asia, and in 672 B. C. reached its ultimate goal in the conquest of Egypt.

Halah, the Habor and the Cities of the Medes. The Israelites were removed

to three localities. The first was Halah, a district which Ptolemy in his Geography calls "Chalcitis." It lies directly north of that point on the Euphrates which is north of Palestine and Syria. This, then, was the nearest to their former home of all the districts to which the Israelites were removed. The second location is described as "on the Habor, the river of Gozan." This river is still known as the Khabour, and is the greatest western affluent of the Euphrates. It flows through Gauzanites, the modern name for Gozan. This region was slightly farther removed from Samaria than Halah. The third region to which the captives of Samaria were taken, was the cities of the Medes. Media lies to the east of Assyria, and the Assyrian monarch who captured Samaria "relates that he overran Media, seizing and annexing to Assyria a number of the towns, and also established in the country a set of fortified posts or colonies." (Rawlinson.) In the towns of this captured region the rest of the Israelites were placed. They were far from home.

1 In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah began Hoshea the son of Elah to reign in Samaria over Israel, and reigned nine years. 2 And he did that

which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, yet not as the kings of Israel that were before him. 3 Against him came up Shalmaneser king of Assyria; and Ho-

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

The introduction to the lesson from Hosea (June 4) related some of the details of the period of anarchy which followed the death of Jeroboam II. The reign of this monarch was the last peaceful period which was granted to Israel. It was less than forty years from the time of the accession of Zechariah, the son of Jeroboam II, till the siege of Samaria. During this time Israel had six monarchs, and one only reigned for a longer period than ten years, and he only escaped being murdered. To add to the burdens of the distracted people, the Assyrians were pushing their campaigns of conquest into this region, and those kings who maintained their hold upon the throne longest did so by imposing heavy taxes upon their kingdom to pay the tribute demanded by Assyria. Dur-

ing this short period the unhappy land suffered three invasions by the Assyrians. While Menahem reigned Pul exacted from the country a thousand talents of silver as tribute (2 Kings 15:19). This Pul is unknown to the Assyrian records, but most authors regard him as identical with Tiglath-pileser, who certainly reigned over Assyria at this time. During the reign of Pekah many cities of northern Israel were captured and their inhabitants were removed as captives (15:29). Finally, during the reign of Hoshea the last king of Israel, another invasion came into the land under the leadership of Shalmaneser. Hoshea was made a tribute king, but he did not keep his oath of allegiance, and Samaria was captured and destroyed in the way described in this lesson.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 1. The twelfth year of Ahaz: Some confusion has crept into the text at this point. In 2 Kings 15:30 the accession of Hoshea is placed in the twentieth year of Jotham, but the twentieth year from his accession would be the fourth year of Ahaz. In the introduction to the preceding lesson it was stated that part of Jotham's reign was in all probability the time that he acted as regent for his father. Different ways of counting the time of his and Ahaz's reign will probably explain these differences, though just what that explanation is unknown to us. **Hoshea:** He is again mentioned in 15:30, but nothing more is told of him except that he obtained the throne by the murder of his predecessor, Pekah.

2. Not as the kings of Israel that were before him: No information is given as to what his superiority over the other kings consisted in. His repentance, if it can be called by this name, was too late and not thorough enough.

3. Shalmaneser: He was the successor of Tiglath-pileser (16:7) and reigned for five years. But little is known of him, since his records were destroyed by his successors. **Became his servant:** Became vassal to king Shalmaneser. **Brought him tribute:** The prophet Hosea (10:14) refers to Shalmaneser's cruel treatment of Beth-arbel of Galilee. This was probably done for the purpose of alarming Hoshea into surrender. The payment of tribute was

shea became his servant, and brought him tribute. 4 And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea; for he had sent messengers to So king of Egypt, and offered no tribute to the king of Assyria, as he had done year by year: therefore the king of Assyria shut him up, and bound him in prison. 5 Then the king of Assyria came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria, and

besieged it three years. 6 In the ninth year of Hoshea the king of Assyria took Samaria, and carried Israel away unto Assyria, and placed them in Halah, and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

7 And it was so, because the children of Israel had sinned against Jehovah their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt from under the hand

a further drain upon an almost exhausted country.

4. Found conspiracy: There must have been Assyrian spies in all the courts of Syria, and these would report Hoshea's negotiations with the king of Egypt. **So king of Egypt:** The name by which this king is known in Egyptian history is Shebek. He was an Ethiopian king that had recently come into possession of the Egyptian throne by conquest. Hoshea was probably tempted to this course by the feeling that in any event he would not gain a harsher master than Shalmaneser, and perhaps a milder one. **Offered no tribute:** At the same time that he opened negotiations with Shebek of Egypt he withheld the tribute from Assyria. This was rebellion.

5. Throughout all the land: It was customary for invaders to overrun the places more easily conquered before the stronghold was attacked. This is what Shalmaneser does. On this occasion he ravaged all the land. This was in 723 B. C. **Three years:** From the fourth to the sixth years of Hezekiah, and from the seventh to the ninth of Hoshea (18: 9, 10), more than two years but less than three, hence counted as three years. It was a long time for Samaria to withstand a siege, but it was for those times almost impregnable. The attack was weakened by the fact that Shalmaneser was besieging Tyre at the same time, and he died before Samaria was taken. The siege was finished by his

successor. There is no information that Egypt aided Hoshea.

6. The king of Assyria took Samaria: According to the Assyrian records it was not Shalmaneser who took Samaria, but Sargon, in the first year of the latter's reign. Sargon is not mentioned in the Bible except in Is. 20:1, but both here and in 18:9, 10 the sacred historian avoids such language as would make him say that Shalmaneser was the captor of the city. Here he says the king of Assyria took it, and in the latter passage "they took it." The change of expression is quite remarkable and makes the agreement between the two records quite complete. **Carried Israel away into Assyria:** This was the custom of Assyrian conquerors. Sargon does not speak of deporting Israel from its home, but he does say that he settled a number of Arabians in the land. (Rawlinson.) In Halah, etc.: (See Geographical Notes.)

7. And it was so, etc.: Here the writer begins to assign the reasons for the captivity. He finds three reasons for this: (1) they adopted idolatry (vs. 7-12), (2) they rejected the law and the warnings of prophets (vs. 13-15), (3) they established the calf worship and passed on from this to grosser forms of illegal worship and to divination (vs. 16-18). **Brought them up out of the land of Egypt:** To turn away from God after this shows on the part of Israel black ingratitude. The deliverance from Egypt was a great act of grace, and it is almost always referred to in the Scriptures

of Pharaoh king of Egypt, and had feared other gods, 8 and walked in the statutes of the nations, whom Jehovah cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they made. 9 And the children of Israel did secretly things that were not right against Jehovah their God: and they built them high places in all their cities, from the tower of the watchmen to the fortified city; 10 and they set them up pillars and Asherim upon every high hill, and under every green tree; 11 and there they burnt incense in all the high places, as did the nations whom Jehovah carried

away before them; and they wrought wicked things to provoke Jehovah to anger; 12 and they served idols, whereof Jehovah had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing. 13 Yet Jehovah testified unto Israel, and Judah, by every prophet, and every seer, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets. 14 Notwithstanding, they would not hear, but hardened their neck like to the neck of their fathers, who believed not in Jehovah their God.

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to indicate the claim which Jehovah has on Israel's gratitude (Ex. 20:2, 3).

8. **The statutes of the nations:** Particularly the customs of the Canaanites, as told in the book of Judges. And of the kings: This verse refers to two kinds of violations of the law: (1) Statutes of nations, *i. e.* imitation of heathen practices; (2) statutes of the kings of Israel, *i. e.*, the worship of the calves and the worship of Baal under Ahab. Which they made: That is, statutes made by the kings of Israel.

9. **Did secretly, etc.:** They pretended to worship Jehovah in the high places, and thus by their pretense glossed over what was really idolatry. **High places in all their cities:** The places where worship was carried on in disregard to the law which limited his worship to the one altar at Jerusalem. Cf. 1 Kings 15:14; 22:43; 2 Kings 12:3; 14:4; 15:35. **From the tower of the watchmen to the fortified city:** The tower would be in the wilderness, built by a shepherd, in which he might stay while guarding his sheep. The fortified city would be the most densely populated part of the land. Hence this phrase is equivalent to "from the loneliest to the populous places." It is proverbial. Cf. 18:8.

10. **Pillars:** Margin, *obelisks*. Stone pillars used in Baal worship. **Asherim:** Wooden pillars used in Baal worship. Sometimes they seem to be confused with images of Astarte.

11. **Burnt incense:** A sacred rite among the Canaanites. Hos. 2:13; 4:13; 11:2; Isa. 65:3-7. It was also among the Greeks and Romans and in the early Christian times a test of one's faith in Christ.

13. **Jehovah testified:** God was not content merely with giving the law, but added grace to grace by warning them through prophets.

14. **Hardened their neck:** A common Hebrew expression which denotes obstinacy and determined self-will. Ex. 32:9; 33:3; Deut. 10:16; Acts 7:51. **Their fathers:** A reference to the Israelites who perished in the wilderness.

15. **Followed vanity:** A name for idolatry. It means *nonentity*. Paul says an idol is nothing in the world (2 Cor. 8:4). **Became vain:** The worship of a nonentity leads to impotence.

16. **All the commandments:** The making of the calves really violated one commandment only, but it led to the violation of all others also. **An Asherah:** According to v. 10 they made many, but

here one is mentioned. The reference is probably to the one made by Ahab in Samaria (1 Kings 16:3). **All the host of heaven:** The worship of stars, though prohibited in Deut. 4:9; 17:3, was not introduced into Israel and Judah till late. It came from the Assyrians and Babylonians. A little later than this it was very prevalent in Judah (Jer. 8:2; 19:13. Zeph. 1:5).

17. To pass through the fire, though they may have been slain before they were placed in the flames. Cf. Jer. 7:31; 19:5; Ez. 16:20, 21; 2 Chron. 28:3. **Divi-**

nation and enchantment: Foretelling the future or seeking guidance by means of casting lots, acts of chance, or omens derived from sights and sounds. Cf. Ez. 21:21, 22, where one method of divination is described. **Sold themselves, etc.:** This was Elijah's description of Ahab's act (1 Kings 21:25).

18. **Removed them out of his sight:** Removed them from his own land. This is an accommodation to human ideas, as is also the statement that God was angry. **The tribes of Judah only:** The kingdom of Judah only which contained the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin.

COMMENTS.

Assyria; Its Policy and Relation to Israel. "For a hundred and twenty years before the advent of Israel, the annals of the Assyrian kings record periodical campaigns against the cities of 'the land of the west,' but these isolated incursions were followed by no permanent results. In 745, however, five years before king Uzziash died, a soldier ascended the throne of Assyria, under the title of Tiglath-pileser II, who was determined to achieve the conquest of the world and its organization as his empire. When his armies came, it was not simply to chastise or demand tribute, but to annex countries, carry away their populations and exploit their resources. It was no longer kings who were threatened; peoples found themselves in danger of extinction. This terrible purpose of the Assyrian was pursued with vast means and the utmost ferocity. He has been called the Roman of the East, and up to a certain degree we may imagine his policy by remembering all that is familiar to us of its execution by Rome: its relentlessness, impetus and mysterious action from one center; the discipline, the speed, the strange appearance, of his armies. But there was an oriental savagery about Assyria from which Rome was free. The Assyrian kings moved in the power of

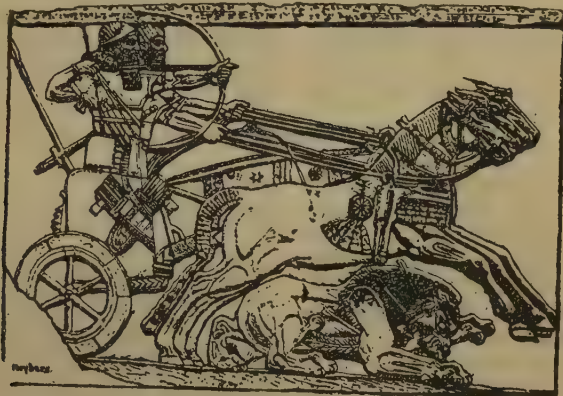
their brutish and stormy gods—gods that were in the shape of bulls and had the wings as of the tempest. The annals of these kings, in which they describe their enemies; about showering tempests of clubs upon them, and raining a deluge of arrows; about overwhelming them, and sweeping them off the face of the land, and with scythes, and wheels clogged with blood; about great baskets stuffed with the salted heads of their foes. It is a mixture of the Roman and Red Indian." (G. A. Smith.)

A Mistaken Policy. "It must have been evident to thoughtful observers, even before Isaiah's entrance on public life, that the independent existence of all the smaller nations of Western Asia was endangered by the steady advance of this new and formidable power. Singly, they were helpless against the solid and disciplined might of Assyria; while at the same time they possessed too little stability of purpose to present a united front to the common enemy. The two Israelitish kingdoms, from their geographical position, ought to have been amongst the last to come into collision with the Assyrian power, and if they had been wise enough to keep aloof from political entanglement they would at least have secured a breathing space in which much might have been accom-

plished for the furtherance of those moral and religious interests which the prophets had at heart. The short-sighted policy of their rulers, however, involved them in premature and compromising relations with the Assyrian empire; and in both cases with disastrous results." (Skinner.)

The Two Reasons for Samaria's Fall. This lesson gives two reasons for the fall of the city. The first is the human reason, and the statement of this reason

onciled is found in our lesson in the statement that Israel "followed vanity and became vain." This means that they followed nonentity and became impotent. The pursuit of anything else than truth and right is sin, and sin always results in decay, and decay produces ruin. Samaria forsook God and chose a worship and course of life which sapped its people of all vigor and moral healthfulness. Its fall came as a natural result of its moral and religious



Assyrian King in Chariot.

reaches its culmination in the first six verses of our lesson. The treasury of the kingdom is exhausted; law and order do not exist in the land; the kings are selfish and exploit their subjects for their own advantage; patriotism and a definite national policy no longer exist. Under such circumstances the fall of Samaria was inevitable, and if Assyria had not been at hand to push it over it would have fallen of its own accord sooner or later.

The second reason is the divine one, and is dwelt upon at considerable length in the lesson. Samaria fell because it forgot God and failed to accomplish the purpose which God had in calling it into existence as a nation. While the two reasons seem at first to be contradictory, yet they merge into one another. The principle upon which they are to be rec-

decay. That which has been called the divine cause of Samaria's fall produced the human condition which brought about ruin.

Too Late for Reformation. "It looks like the bitter irony of fate that Hoshea, who was to be the last king, was a better one than any of his predecessors. The words of the prophets who had uttered so many and such important truths concerning this kingdom during the last fifty years, may have exercised a powerful influence over him and instilled into him better principles. But they had always predicted its fall as certain, and now the irresistible force of history was to prove that no single man, whatever may be his position and superiority, could be strong enough to delay the ruin of the whole structure if the right me-

ment for its reformation had passed." (Ewald.)

Lesson for Our Time. "Would that men when they read such passages, would stop and think, and would enter upon a comparison between the peoples of God at that time and of this, and would thus make application of the lesson of history. The responsibility of to-day is far greater, for they were called to righteousness under the old law, we under the gospel of free grace. The people of the ten tribes did not reject belief in God at first; but they made to themselves an image of him. This was the beginning of their downfall, the germ of their ruin. This led from

error to error. They commenced with an image of Jehovah; they finished with the frightful sacrifices of Moloch. He who has once abandoned the center of revealed truth, sinks inevitably deeper and deeper, either into unbelief or into superstition, so that he finally comes to consider darkness light, and folly wisdom. So it was in Israel, so it is now in Christendom. He who abandons the central truth of Christianity—Christ, the Son of God—is in the way of losing God. A nation which no longer respects the Word of God, but makes a religion for itself, according to its own good pleasure, will sooner or later come to ruin." (*Ibid.*)

THE LESSON STORY.

The downfall of Samaria came as the necessary result of Israel's hopeless apostasy. It culminated in the reign of Hoshea, Israel's last and best king. "It seems like a hard jest," says Ewald, "that this Hoshea, who was better than all his predecessors, was to be the last king." But through many years of stubborn rebellion, ingratitude and idolatry—through all the inconstancy and whims of a perverted childishness—the people had made it impossible to correct their sins without destroying their nation.

Up to the very hour of its downfall the nation had been favored with Jehovah's richest privileges. Like Chorazin, Samaria had been exalted to heaven. From Jeroboam, the first king—to whom God gave freely the key of opportunity—to Hoshea, the last, each enjoyed the services of some faithful prophet. Each was duly warned, rebuked and admonished. But the voice of God, speaking through his prophets in Israel, was in vain.

Beginning in the days of Jeroboam, with the worship of calves at Dan and Bethel, the nation went farther and farther into worldliness and idolatry. In the days of Ahab and Jezebel Baal worship was introduced with its profane

ties and impurities. Afterwards from the Assyrians they learned to bow down to the host of heaven, and, sinking yet deeper into idol worship, they gathered from the Moabites and Ammonites the abominable rites of Moloch.

One of the most striking and hardening sins of Israel was ingratitude. God had called Israel out of Egypt; had delivered the nation from the bondage of Pharaoh with a high hand and outpoured mercy. Notwithstanding that signal and memorable mercy, Israel had gone astray after other gods and had walked in the ways of the heathen around them. Then, too, the marks of God's providence followed the chosen people in all their journeyings through the wilderness. But Israel was a stubborn and rebellious people.

Therefore the Assyrian, as a tempest of hail, and as a flood of waters overflowing, swept the nation down to the earth with violence. Such was the end of Israel. After only two and a half centuries this kingdom, so rich in blessings and opportunities, fell into hopeless destruction. Its king was cut off as the foam upon the water and its ten tribes were mixed with the heathen races around them "without any further

national identification or history." Sin is a sure pay-master. It may not pay at the close of every day or week, but pays in full at the end. "The wages of sin is death." No nation and no person can attain to the highest good, or reach the measure and reward of God's will, without supreme consecration to the true God of Israel and without suffering and serving.

"Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people."

"The wicked shall be turned back into Sheol, even all the nations that forget God." Godliness is profitable in all things, both to a nation and to the individual. Great, indeed, is the cemetery of the dead nations. Upon every tomb might be inscribed, "Died from forgetting God."

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. How did Hezekiah—in his character and reign—compare with the former kings of Judah?

2. What was the religious, and what the political, condition of Judah at the accession of Hezekiah to the throne?

3. What great reform did the king begin as soon as he was made king?

4. What would you denominate as the strongest point in his character?

5. What feature of his call to the Passover showed his largeness of mind and the great breadth of his sympathies?

6. Why was the Passover celebrated

out of its regular time?

7. Why was the Passover continued twice its usual length of observance?

8. What great Passover for us did the Jewish Passover typify?

9. Note the analogy between the call of King Hezekiah to the Passover at Jerusalem and the call of Christ to all nations to come to him and to all believers to union in him.

10. Note, furthermore, the glorious hope held out to the divided and distracted nations in the midst of their darkness and despair. Isa. 9:6-7.

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. Who began to reign in Israel during the life of Ahaz, king of Judah and father of Hezekiah? 2 Kings 17:1.

2. What condemnation is chronicled against him? 2 Kings 17:2.

3. What king came up against Hoshea and found his nation an easy prey? 2 Kings 17:3.

4. Why did the king of Assyria shut up and bind Hoshea in prison? 2 Kings 17:4.

5. How long did the king of Assyria besiege Samaria? 2 Kings 17:5.

6. What became of Samaria in the ninth year of the reign of Hoshea? 2 Kings 17:6.

7. What, in connection with the captivity of Israel and as its primary cause, was charged against the nation? 2 Kings 17:7,8,

8. What is written against their secret conduct before Jehovah? 2 Kings 17:9.

9. What sin particularly was odious to God as the root of other sins? 2 Kings 17:10, 11.

10. Had the Lord faithfully and clearly forbidden idolatry? 2 Kings 17:12.

11. How did God show his mercy and desire to win Israel and Judah back to him and his righteousness and prosperity, in spite of their sins? 2 Kings 17:13.

12. With what success did the Lord's call meet at the hands of his chosen people? 2 Kings 17:14.

13. Rejecting the statutes of Jehovah, what did they follow? 2 Kings 17:15.

14. What example always stood before ignorant Israel as a temptation? 2 Kings 17:15.

15. What indicated that the break

with God, on the part of Israel, was complete? 2 Kings 17:16.

16. What is the meaning of causing sons and daughters "to pass through the fire"? See Explanatory Notes, verse 17.

17. What very strong and significant expression in this connection shows the utter abandonment of Israel to wickedness? 2 Kings 17:17.

18. In order to make men understand the great grief of God on account of the wickedness of Israel, what passion is here attributed to God? 2 Kings 17:18.

19. As an explanation of what is meant by God's anger, see Mark 3:5.

20. What, then, at last is given as the reason why God removed Israel and destroyed the nation? 2 Kings 17:18.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that through patience and through comfort of the Scriptures we might have hope." See Romans 15:4. Note that, not *in*, but *through* the Scriptures comes our hope. Christ himself is our hope, as he is also our peace. Our hope is a person. Through all the vicissitudes and darkness of the life of Israel and Judah, notwithstanding the degeneracy and grossness of their sins, the prophets still held out the great hope of the nation and of all nations. Now and then the light broke through all clouds and gloom, and prophets grew eloquent in pointing forward to the coming golden age: "Unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful, Counsellor, Mighty God, Father of Eternity, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and of peace there shall be no end." Isa. 9:6, 7.

2. In the history of Israel we see the testimony exemplified: "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people." Prov. 14:34. Sin is the seed of national, as well as of personal,

decay and death. "The wages of sin is death." Public virtue and uprightness receive tremendous emphasis in the Old Testament Scriptures. "The wicked shall be turned back into Sheol, even all the nations that forget God" (Psa. 9:17). Christianity is meant as salt and light, as spirit and spiritual dominion, for the nation through the church and its godly members. We are to use our Christianity as citizens, as well as to use it in our homes and business. It must regulate our politics, even as our conversation and opinions. Religion, as it is in Christ, must not be divorced from any act, thought or calling of the Christian.

3. After all, the downfall of Samaria was a step forward in God's great plan of salvation. Despite the blindness and sins of men and nations, God's goodness shall go forward. In due season Jesus was born. In due season he died for our sins. In due season he arose from the grave, ascended and came in Spirit at Pentecost. In due season his people shall be united, and in due season the world shall hear his gospel of salvation. Only let us take heed to keep in line with his purpose.

JUNE 25.

REVIEW.

Lesson XIII.

June 25.

REVIEW.

GOLDEN TEXT—What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God? Micah 6:8.

DAILY READINGS.

June 19.... M—2 Kings 5:1-27—Elisha Healing Naaman the Syrian.
2 Kings 6:8-23—Elisha's Heavenly Defenders.

June 20.... T—2 Kings 11:1-20—Joash, the Boy King, Crowned.
2 Kings 11:21—12:16—Joash Repairs the Temple.

June 21.... W—Jonah 3:1-4:11—God's Pity for the Heathen.
2 Cor. 26:1-23—Uzziah, King of Judah, Humbled.

June 22.... T—Isaiah 6:1-13—Isaiah's Vision and Call to Service.
Isaiah 5:1-12—Song of the Vineyard.

June 23.... F—Micah 4:1-8—Micah's Picture of Universal Peace.
Hosea 14:1-9—Isaiah's Penitence and God's Pardon.

June 24.... S—2 Chron. 30:1-27—Hezekiah's Great Passover.

June 25.... S—2 Kings 17:1-18—The Downfall of Samaria.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

As in the first quarter, our lessons during the past three months were enacted within the territory of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. To this statement there is just one exception. The events which constituted the lessons from Jonah took place in far-away Nineveh. During the period covered by the lessons of the second quarter, the territory of Israel shrank for a time, then expanded to its greatest extent, and then dwindled away till its final collapse. It was in a fairly flourishing condition at the close of Ahab's reign, the date at which the quarter begins. The Syrians of Damascus were rising into power, however, and during the period of Ahab's descendants and the earlier rulers of the dynasty of Jehu, reduced Israel to a deplorable con-

dition of weakness and its territory to very narrow limits. Then came the period of expansion and prosperity during the reign of Jeroboam II. But this brilliant period did not last beyond the lifetime of this monarch. During the period of anarchy, there followed the inevitable reduction of territory and fortunes of the northern kingdom. The territory over which Hoshea reigned was a small fraction only of the original kingdom. The history of Judah during this time is more uniformly prosperous, and its territory suffers no decided contractions. During the reign of Uzziah it reached its largest extent. Under Ahaz it suffered the loss of some of its possessions, but the wavering fortunes of Damascus and Israel permitted Hezekiah to regain these, in part at least.

HISTORICAL SURVEY.

During the first hundred years of their divided history we traced the varying fortunes of the sister kingdoms of Israel and Judah. From Rehoboam to Jehoshaphat

Judah was quiet. No storm or revolution marked the even course of its career. But little of importance occurred in its history during this period. But all of the

time it was marching forward in the straight line of true progress and was storing up a reserve of power which was to test and prove its true worth. Israel's history during the same period was more varied and had far more stirring incidents. Its periods were separated by bloodshed, uprisings and civil war. Already by the time of Ahab, *failure* was written across the pages of its history. It had turned from God, and this meant that it was missing the chief purpose of its existence. The lessons of this quarter do but emphasize these diverging lines of progress. Israel hastens on its path of ruin. Jehovah is less and less in their thoughts. The worship of other gods becomes the prevailing fashion. The search of wealth was the national ideal, and selfishness the national weakness. The prophets labored bravely to rescue it, and for a time the nation seemed to return to the worship of Jehovah. A national reaction against heathendom and in favor of the God of Israel promised better things; but in the end it failed, more, perhaps, because of the greed for wealth than because of downright idolatry. It was not finally to fall without a great effort to save it. But Amos and Hosea, the last prophets to bring upon the conscience of Israel the truth of God, testify how ripe for destruction it was. The long struggle before its doom, the prolonged death agony, the frequent revolutions, testify how much of vitality and strength there was in Israel, but its ultimate fall proves that no nation which forgets God can prosper. With the fall of Samaria the ten tribes cease to be a factor in the history of God's chosen people and his salvation. The promise was to them equally with Judah, but they sinned away their opportunity. The number carried away by Sargon, according to his own figures, was pitifully small. Many had become swallowed up in the heathendom and political life of their idolatrous neighbors. Many remained in the land after Sargon's deportation, but

they had little moral and religious stability. They united with other tribes, and out of the union sprang up the Samaritans. They brought into the union a few superstitions, the surviving elements of their ancient faith. The rest were carried away and in time lost their identity. Now and then we find traces of a few of them, and in all probability many became re-incorporated with Judah after its return from exile, but the others,

"Like the dew on the mountain,
Like the foam on the river,
Like the bubble on the fountain,
They are gone and forever."

Since they did not have elements of worth to justify the God of all nations in keeping them in their ancient land, it is idle to hope that they were kept intact within the ocean of sin and idolatry which flowed over them. There has been much speculation in Christian circles concerning them, but the following extract seems to give a fair statement concerning their probable fate: "There has been a widespread belief among modern Christians that the Ten Tribes, having never returned to their native country, must still exist somewhere in a collected body. Travelers have thought to discover them in Malabar, in Kashmir, in China, in Turkistan, in Afghanistan, in Germany, in North America. Books have been written advocating this or that identification, and the notion has thus obtained extensive currency that somewhere or other in the world the descendants of the Ten Tribes must exist, and that when found they might be recognized as such by careful and diligent inquiry. It seems to have been forgotten that, in the first place, they were scattered over a wide extent of country (Hauran, Chalchit, Gozan and Media) by the original conquerors; that, secondly, in the numerous conquests and changes of populations which are known to have taken place in these regions they would naturally become more scattered; that, thirdly, a con-

siderable number of them probably returned with the Jews under Zerubbabel and Ezra (Ezra 5:17; 8:35; 1 Chron. 9:3); that, fourthly, those who remained behind would naturally either mingle with the heathen among whom they lived or become united with the Jews of the dispersion; and that, fifthly, if there had been anywhere in this part of Asia at the time of Alexander's conquest or of the Roman expedition against Parthia and Persia, a community of the peculiar character supposed, it is most improbable that no Greek or Roman historian or geographer should have mentioned it. Against these arguments there is nothing to be set but a statement of Josephus, in the first century of our era, that the Ten Tribes still existed beyond the Euphrates in his day (he does not say in a collective form); and a similar declaration of Jerome in the fifth. Neither writer has any personal acquaintance with the countries, or speaks from his own knowledge. Both may be regarded as relating rather what they suppose must be, than what they know actually was the case. Again, neither may mean more than that among the Hebrews of the dispersion (Acts 2:8) in Parthia, Media, Elam and Mesopotamia were many Israelites. On the whole, therefore, it would seem probable, (1) that the Ten Tribes never formed a community in their exile, but were scattered from the first; and (2) that their descendants either blended with the heathen and were absorbed, or returned to Palestine with Zerubbabel and Ezra, or became inseparably united with the dispersed Jews in Mesopotamia and the adjacent countries. No discovery, therefore, of the Ten Tribes is to be expected, nor can any works written to prove their identity with any existing race or body of persons be regarded as anything more than ingenious exertions." Concerning Judah, the report is far more probable. The usurpation of Athaliah was a severe test of the nation's loyalty to Jehovah, but the result

was quite to its credit. After this it returned to its former calm and unexciting progress toward its final destiny. Some of its kings were abler than others. There were periods of adversity, but two great historical facts stand out as the great molding influences of Judah's national character. The first was its adhesion to the worship of Jehovah, especially as this centered in the altar and temple in Jerusalem. The other was the stability of the Davidic line. It had gross sins, as Micah and Isaiah testify, but it was able to weather the storm of the Assyrian period and by the time of the Babylonian captivity it had become sufficiently stable to pass safely through this period of stress and take up its distinctive career beyond.

Lesson 1.—Elisha Heals Naaman the Syrian.

Golden Text—Look unto me and be ye saved, all the ends of the earth; for I am God and there is none else. Isa 45:22.

Lesson Facts—The commander of the forces of Ben-hadad of Damascus was Naanan. Under his leadership the Damascene forces had won brilliant victories, had defeated the Assyrians and had formed a great confederacy of petty powers. He suffered from some disease which the historian calls leprosy, though it probably was not identical with the malady known to modern science by this name. A captive maiden from Israel told his wife that a prophet in Israel had power to effect his cure. Acting on this information, he started to Israel bearing great wealth and credentials from his king. But a prophet is not without honor save at home, and the king of Israel seemed to be entirely ignorant of any power possessed by Elisha to cure leprosy. The prophet, however, sent for him and commanded him to go to the Jordan and dip himself seven times. After some hesitation on account of the absurdity, to him, of the command, he went and re-

turned cured, his flesh being like that of a little child. The value of the incident consists in its illustrations of the possession and lack of faith. The Hebrew maiden had faith; Naaman himself had faith enough to act on the suggestion, though it was little better than superstition; and the king of Israel lacked faith. The one condition of obtaining the healing was for Naaman to follow implicitly the instruction of the prophet, and when he does this he is cured.

Lesson II.—Elisha's Heavenly Defenders.

Golden Text—For he shall give his angels charge over thee, to keep thee in all thy ways. Ps. 91:11.

Lesson Facts.—Elisha gave aid to the king of Israel by informing him of the proposed movements of the king of Syria. At this time Elisha seems to have made his home in Samaria, and he aided Israel in order to give it proof of Jehovah's power and thus awakened within it faith. The king of Syria was disturbed by the frequent frustration of his plans and naturally decided that there was a spy in his court. One of his servants had the information which enabled him to correctly explain that Elisha was giving the information to Israel's king. He planned at once to arrest Elisha, and for this purpose sent a band of men to Dothan, where Elisha then was. On awaking in the morning the servant of Elisha was disturbed to find the city surrounded, but the prophet informed him that "they that are with us are more than they that are with them." He prayed that this might be demonstrated to the servant, and so he saw a vision of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha. The lesson taught is that Jehovah is able and is willing to protect his servant and that at all times man's surest protection is in him. No evil can come to man without his knowledge and permission.

Lesson III.—Joash, the Boy King, Crowned in Judah.

Golden Text.—Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart. Ps. 119:2.

Lesson Facts.—Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, the wife of Jehoram, king of Judah, became the queen-mother on the accession of her son Ahaziah. When he was slain by Jehu this position would pass to another, and Athaliah could not tolerate the thought of retirement into obscurity, and so she slew all males of the royal family (as she supposed) and seized the throne. The wife of the high priest saved from the slaughter, however, an infant child, Joash, the son of Ahaziah, and concealed him in a chamber of the temple. Here he was kept concealed for six years, and at the end of that time the high priest Jehoiada carefully planned the overthrow of Athaliah and the seating upon the throne its loyal heir. The time chosen for this enterprise was the Sabbath day, probably in part because the movement of the guards was more favorable and at that time Jerusalem would be thronged with worshipers from the country. The place was the temple, the usual site of coronations. The guards were favorable to Jehoiada's plans, and on the day the boy Joash was brought into the temple and proclaimed king. Attracted by the unusual clamor, Athaliah came into the temple and recognized the significance of the events at a glance. She was hurried out of the temple and then slain. David's house was almost destroyed, but in the way described its utter annihilation was averted.

Lesson IV.—Joash Repairs the Temple.

Golden Text—Then the people rejoiced, for that they offered willingly. 1 Chron. 29:9.

Lesson Facts.—The temple had fallen into disrepair during the time that idolatry had been favored by the kings of

Judah. One of the early acts of Joash was to plan the restoration and the repair of the temple. But money had to be collected for this purpose, and the priests were assigned to the task of stimulating the usual channels of revenue, so that there would be sufficient for their own support and for the repair of the temple. In this, however, they were complete failures. The money did not come. They are not charged with any dishonesty, and at most they seem to have been guilty of inefficiency and lack of enterprise. The king accordingly changed the method of collecting the money. It was taken out of the hands of the priests and a chest was placed in a convenient place, and the people were to make voluntary contributions for the specific purpose of repairing the temple. Safeguards were placed around the money so that none might be diverted from its purpose, and at once confidence was restored and the money was raised. In contrast to the inefficiency of the priests, the workmen who had charge of the repair work of the temple showed a high degree of trustworthiness. So marked was this that no accounting was required of them.

Lesson V.—God's Pity of the Heathen.

Golden Text—Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations. Matt. 28:19.

Lesson Facts—Jonah had been told to go to Nineveh and proclaim its doom on account of its sins. This he refused to do. The probable reason for his refusal was that he was unwilling to preach to a Gentile people, though he himself says that he knew even then that God would show mercy to Nineveh in case it repented. He attempted to flee, but was stopped, and after his experience in the great fish, was a second time given the same command. This time he went, and for one day proclaimed along the streets of Nineveh its approaching doom. The result on the people of Nineveh was altogether favorable. They repented, and

according to the customs of Nineveh, manifested their penitence. Jonah in the meantime, displeased with the indication of repentance on the part of the Ninevites, withdrew to the eastern side of the city, and there in an extemporized hut, over which was cast the shade from a castor bean plant, he awaited the spectacle of Nineveh's overthrow. He was bitterly disappointed that it did not come, for God had spared the city on account of its repentance. Early in the morning the castor bean plant that shaded his hut was destroyed by a caterpillar, and over its loss the prophet grieved sorely. Out of this incident came the lesson of the book. Jonah loved the plant though it had sprung up without his toil. But God had labored over Nineveh. It was great and thronged with many innocents. According to Jonah's own standard, God did well in showing mercy to it.

Lesson VI.—Uzziah, the King of Judah, Humbled.

Golden Text—Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Prov. 16:18.

Lesson Facts—Under the skillful guidance of Uzziah, Judah reached a height of prosperity never attained, either before or after. Many of the surrounding nations were either incorporated into his kingdom or at least paid him tribute. Internally also the nation prospered. He directed extensive enterprises, in building, in stock-raising, in agriculture, and in military affairs. His army was well equipped, and his capital was strongly fortified. His great success, however, filled him with pride, and in imitation of contemporary kings he made the attempt to conduct the worship within the temple. In other words, this was an invasion of the priests' right by the king. In his attempt to burn the incense in the temple services Uzziah was resisted by the priests, who gathered in sufficient number to force him from the sacred in-

closure. His face suddenly showed white blotches in contrast to the red of his angry face. This was the sign of leprosy, and, humbled and condemned, he was hurried from the temple without resistance. For the rest of his life he lived in a lazaret-house.

Lesson VII.—Isaiah's Vision and Call to Service.

Golden Text—I heard the voice of the Lord, saying, Whom shall I send, and who will go for us? Then said I, Here am I; send me. Isaiah 6:8.

Lesson Facts—This lesson is supposed to give an account of Isaiah's call to become a prophet for Jehovah. It was in the year that Uzziah died. This is more than a date. It is a statement of the circumstances which impelled Isaiah to the prophetic office. He was in the temple. In a vision he saw the Lord seated upon a lofty throne surrounded by seraphim. Isaiah felt his own personal guilt and the guilt of the people among whom he lived, and cried out that he was undone. One of the seraphim took from the altar a live coal and with it touched his lips and pronounced him clean. The cleansing efficacy of the altar was thus transferred to him. He heard a voice calling, "Whom shall I send? and who will go for us?" The prophet at once offered himself, and forthwith he was given a commission to preach to his own people but coupled with it was the assurance that his preaching would have no beneficial effect. It was to drive men from God rather than to him. To the prophet's question, "How long?" was given the answer, "Till the captivity has come and the land is desolate." Yet the future was not left without some hope. A germ was to be in the banished nation, out of which was to come a new people.

Lesson VIII.—Song of the Vineyard.

Golden Text.—Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine, and men of strength to mingle strong drink. Isa. 5:22.

Lesson Facts—In the form of a parable the prophet rebukes Judah and Jerusalem for their unfaithfulness to God. Sometimes he assumes to himself the place of a friend to the owner of the vineyard, and speaks for him, and then as he applies the parable he becomes the voice of God, telling of the unfruitfulness of his vineyard. Judah was the vineyard of Jehovah. From it he expected the fruit of justice and righteousness. Instead he was receiving only oppression and the clamor of the wronged. From this story, with its application, the prophet turns to the denunciation of some of the specific sins of Judah. These are the wild grapes which God's choice vineyard was producing. A number of sins are mentioned, but all of them are forms of two gross sins, greed for wealth and intemperance. For such sins as these the captivity with its desolation and suffering is impending.

Lesson IX.—Micah's Picture of Universal Peace. (Micah 4:1-8.)

Golden Text—Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more. Micah. 4:3.

Lesson Facts—From amid wars and rumors of wars Micah prophesied of a day of universal peace. It is an expression of the optimism and faith of the prophet. Jehovah is not only a God who is right, but who does right. He works constantly that righteousness may prevail. For him to fail would mean that he is less than almighty. This Micah did not believe. He must succeed, and so "in the latter days" there is a time when he shall have overcome all forces that do harm to man. The one disturbing factor of Judah's national life at that time was war, and what is more natural than that Micah should describe that day of perfect things as a time of peace. All nations are to submit to Jehovah's just and pleasing rule. Contentment and happiness shall be the heritage of every man, and from all distant lands the suffering

of his nation shall come back to Mount Zion, which shall be the center of the peaceful earth.

Lesson X.—Israel's Penitence and God's Pardon.

Golden Text—Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful, slow to anger. Neh. 9:17.

Lesson Facts—Of all the prophets of the Old Testament Hosea has the keenest appreciation of God's mercy and love. He compares it to the love of a husband for his bride. But this bride of God has broken her marriage vow and stained her life with unchastity. But God still loved, and Hosea's book is mainly an account of his efforts to woo and win again the love of his sinful bride. The chapter which constitutes this lesson is full of this tenderness and love, notwithstanding, their sins. Sometimes the prophet speaks in words of appeal; at times he becomes the voice of God addressing to them an invitation to repentance; and then again he fancies that he can hear the people themselves giving expression to their determination to forsake sin and obtain the blessings of God. It was the prophet's last appeal. It depicts tenderly the graciousness of God and the fact that repentance is ever offered to man. It is a longing and hope which the prophet was not, however, to see realized.

Lesson XI.—Hezekiah's Great Passover.

Golden Text—Man looketh on the outward appearance, but God looketh on the heart. 1 Sam. 16:7.

Lesson Facts—Israel was hastening towards its final doom, but on the throne at Jerusalem there sat a young and pious king. He made the worship of Jehovah the prime concern of his reign. The first New Year that followed his accession was chosen as the day on which a regular religious reformation was to begin. The

temple was thoroughly purified, but not in time to celebrate the Passover at the regular time. A month later it was kept with great splendor and much rejoicing. Invitations were sent, not only to all of Judah, but to Israel as well. Many of the latter nation accepted it, and its observance was not eclipsed by any similar gathering since the days of Solomon. A few circumstances marred the happiness of the occasion. Many of the priests were dilatory to purify themselves that they might perform the duties of their office. Towards the end of the gathering they took up their work. Many of those who accepted the invitation came without the ceremonial purification which the law required. Hezekiah prayed that God should accept their intentions instead of formal compliance with the details of the law. To this prayer Jehovah hearkened. At the end of the legal time for the Passover it was decided to extend it for another seven days, and thus was inaugurated the reign of one of the most religious of Judah's kings.

Lesson XII.—The Downfall of Samaria

Golden Text—He that being often reproved hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy. Prov. 29:1.

Lesson Facts—The first half of the last century of Israel's existence was a time of great prosperity. It seemed then that Israel might continue indefinitely. But it was the Indian-summer of the nation's history. With the beginning of its last half century there came a period of anarchy, when all authority was broken and the hopes of the nation were destroyed. King after king was murdered. wave after wave of foreign invasion swept over the land; heavier and heavier burdens of tribute were imposed upon the helpless people. At length their king had no longer power to resist; no wealth remained in the land with which to pay tribute. The persons of the citizens are

the only thing which remained to satisfy the greed of their oppressors. All of the country was overrun and Samaria, their capital, was invested. They fought with the bravery of despair, but the city fell after a contest of almost three years, and the people were scattered among distant peoples, and as a separate body they ceased altogether. It was the verdict of

justice that they must thus perish, for they had failed utterly to fulfill the great destiny to which God had called them. He designed that they should be worshipers of him, and be an example to other nations; but they worshiped idols and followed the ways of heathen nations. "Therefore, Jehovah was very angry with Israel and removed them out of his sight."

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. *Subject:—The Lord Heals Naaman.*

Golden Text:—"Look unto me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth," etc. Isa 45:22 Neither is there salvation in any other.

2. *Subject:—Elisha's Heavenly Defenders.*

Golden Text:—"He will give his angels charge over thee," etc. Psa. 91:11. Satan quoted this text to Jesus. Jesus rightly applied it.

3. *Subject:—Joash, the Boy King, Crowned In Jerusalem.*

Golden Text:—"Blessed are they that keep his testimonials," etc. Psa. 119:2. Safety and Success follow the keeping of God's commandments.

4. *Subject:—Joash Repairs the Temple.*

Golden Text:—"Then the people rejoiced that they offered willingly," 1 Chron. 29:19. Strong emphasis is put upon cheerful giving and service.

5. *Subject:—God's Pity for the Heathen.*

Golden Text:—"Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations," Matt. 28:19: God's willingness and man's unwillingness illustrated.

6. *Subject:—Uzziah, King of Judah, Humbled.*

Golden Text:—"Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before

a fall." Prov. 16:18. Pride is a sin so subtle and deadly that men should shun it always.

7. *Subject:—Isiah's Vision, Call and Answer.*

Golden Text:—"Then I said, Here am I; send me." Isa. 6:8. Great is God's demand now for men cleansed and having vision.

8. *Subjects—Song of the Vineyard. A Temperance Lesson.*

Golden Text:—"Woe unto them that are mighty to drink wine," etc. Isa. 5:22. When God says, "Woe", men should stop. He says "woe" to drunkard-makers.

9. *Subject:—Micah's Picture of Universal Peace.*

Golden Text:—"Nation shall not lift up sword against nation." Micah. 4:3. Christ is the great Prince of Peace. He is our Peace and Hope.

10. *Subject:—Israel's Penitence and God's Pardon.*

Golden Text:—"Thou art a God ready to pardon, gracious and merciful." Neh. 9:17. We ought always to remember promises of pardon and their conditions.

11. *Subject:—Hezekiah's Great Passover in Jerusalem.*

Golden Text:—"Man looketh on the outward appearance, but Jehovah on the heart." 1 Sam. 16:7. The spirit is

more important than the letter. Let us have both.

12. *Subject:—The Downfall of Samaria.*

Golden Text:—"He that being re-proved hardeneth his neck shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy." Prov. 29:1. God is patient in his reproofs.

13. *Subject:—Review for the Second Quarter.*

Golden Text:—"What doth the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Micah 6:8. These Golden Texts are golden indeed. Each pupil should know them.

QUESTIONS ON THE REVIEW, ANSWERS TO WHICH WILL BE FOUND IN THE LESSONS.

1. What were Naaman's character, nation and occupation?

a—Of what and in what manner was he cured?

2. Whom did Elisha see as his heavenly defenders at Dothan?

b—What blessing came to his servant and to the Syrian soldiers?

3. How was the life of the Boy Joash saved that he might become king?

c—What ungrateful and cruel deed did he do after the death of Jehoiada?

4. What special enterprise did Joash undertake and carry through?

d—Would you call a life beginning well and ending ill successful?

5. What very important work did God call Jonah to perform?

e—How did the prophet show his unwillingness and God his eagerness?

6. To what extent did king Uzziah prosper in Judah?

f—What distressing sin did he commit? Why? What was the result?

7. Whom did Isaiah see, and what did he learn in his vision?

g—What was his call, what his qualification and what his response?

8. In what respect, or in what respects, were God's people like a vineyard?

h—What were the first named three sins of which they were guilty?

9. What happy coming state did Micah picture to his people?

i—Through whom alone shall eventually come universal peace?

10. With what favor does God offer to meet Israel's penitence?

j—Can you recall or find some precious promise of mercy and pardon?

11. What were some of the remarkable features about Hezekiah's Passover?

k—What does the Apostle Paul say about our Passover? 1 Cor. 5:7.

12. What was the real cause—assigned of God—for Israel's downfall?

l—Name some who helped, and others who held back, on the way to ruin.

13. No lesson is more important than the Review.

m—It helps to make all the lessons your own; to impress them deeply.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. God was the same in the days of the kings and prophets of Israel and Judah that he is to-day. The people were not then sufficiently advanced to receive the lessons and obtain the blessings we are receiving now. He wanted to save the

heathen nations then as he does now; but then the people were not ready to go as missionaries, and the message and the Spirit of the glorified Christ were not then given. Men had to be trained; prophecies had to be made and fulfilled; the law had to be given and human fail-

ures had to be seen and impressed upon the minds of the people. In the fullness of time God gave his Son to bring men to God and his righteousness.

2. The value of the Old Testament consists, in part, in setting forth God's character and will to a rebellious and sinful people. His kindness and compassion shine out even through the dark clouds in which God found it necessary to meet Israel. Another value, and its

peculiar value, is in its prophecies and preparations for the coming of the Messiah so often and variously promised.

3. Clouds of ignorance, lightnings of wrath against sin, floods of disaster, chariots of war, wanderings, pestilence, rebellions, failures and deaths—all the discords and grindings, overthrows and captivities of nations—were overruled of God to educate the race for the reception of the life in Christ

SUGGESTIVE OUTLINE OF THE LESSONS OF THE SECOND QUARTER.

Lesson No. 1.—April 2.

NAAMAN CLEANSED OF LEPROSY.

1. *He was Great but a Leper.*

Many people are like him.

Leprosy is a type of sin.

It is a loathsome, deadly thing.

Sin is the world's plague.

It will ruin greatness.

2. *There was cure only in God.*

No remedy for sin but in Christ.

All means fail save the blood of Christ.

"Besides him there is no Saviour."

3. *His Faith Came by Hearing.*

A little maid spoke the word.

A little maid desired his cure.

A little maid believed in God.

Are we telling of "the Prophet"?

Are we bringing men under the Gospel—to the preaching?

Are we leading the sinful to churches?

4. *The Method was Simple, Effectual.*

No exaltation of the human.

No glory taken to the prophet.

Not in method but in God.

But God's method was essential.

5. *The Lord was Glorified.*

Cleansing not in water. See 1 Pet. 3:21.

Cleansing in the Lord, in his name.

Cleansing not even in obedience.

The merit and efficacy in God.

"Salvation is of the Lord."

Naaman knew the cure was of God.

6. *Naaman a Gentile—God Seeks All.*
The great commission—"all nations."
Heathen missions yet in the dawning.
God's cure must be made universal.

Lesson No. 2.—April 9.

ELISHA'S HEAVENLY DEFENDERS.

1. *Elisha, Patriot, Seer, Statesman.*

He loved and served the nation.

His knowledge prevented attack.

He was invaluable to the king.

He represented the word of God.

2. *He Saw, and Walked by, the Invisible.*

How vain the scheme to take him!

How sure and cheering his security!

He lived and acted as unto God.

3. *His Prayer for his Servant.*

Servant distressed and fearful.

Servant saw only foes and danger.

Through prayer he saw God's host.

How useful are they who see the spirit-

ual and help others to see,

They are needed to protect, lead and to

teach the blind; also to show them

God's great mercy. Thus he helps

others beside his servant.

Lesson No. 3.—April 16.

JOASH, THE BOY KING, CROWNED.

1. *The Nation and Time into Which Born.*

The evil past; idolatry; low ideals;

wicked leaders; discouragement.

What has been done to reform.

How much remains to be done!

2. *A Faithful, Godly Friend, Jehoiada.*
His faith, courage, patience, purpose.
His skill, example and success.
Also note his failure in training the young king for future tests.

3. *The Child Himself as King.*
Honor at coronation.
Evils against him.
Advantages on his side.
Providence favored him.
Disaster through bad counsel.

4. *Every Child a King.*
Providence; opportunity.
Christianity and childhood.
New importance attached to childhood. Jesus loved children.

Lesson 3.—April 16.

THE RESURRECTION OF CHRIST.

(An Alternate Lesson.)

1. *The Greatest Miracle.*
All other miracles are easy to receive if this be true.
It was the climax of a supernatural life on earth.
It was prophesied by David; prefigured in the sacrifice of Isaac and the sorrowful experience of Jonah.
It was repeatedly foretold by our Lord himself; but was too incredible and mysterious to be understood or believed.
All the disciples convinced.
Many and varied appearances culminating in vigorous faith.
The apostles bore witness of the resurrection. Paul said that "If Christ hath not been raised, then is our preaching vain; your faith also is vain. Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God and ye are yet in your sins."
2. *Perhaps when We Shall See with Eyes Trained in Heaven We Shall See a Spiritual Beauty, Necessity, and Power in Jesus' Resurrection Which Our Weak Eyes Cannot Now Perceive.*

I believe its moral significance was greater than its physical,—great as was the latter.

To know Christ and the power of his resurrection was an aim and pursuit worthy of Paul. Let it be our aim as well.

Somehow it was impossible that he should be holden of death.

Somehow the resurrection was a connecting link between his humiliation and his glory; between his incarnation and the gift of his Spirit.

Somehow it had in it a transforming power, changing the disciples from weakness to strength; from fear to courage and certain hope.

Believers shall be fashioned into the likeness of his glory.

He was proved to be the Son of God by his resurrection from the dead.

Lesson 4.—April 23.

JOSIAH REPAIRS THE TEMPLE.

1. *The Great Work to be Done.*
Under Athaliah the temple had been neglected; son had robbed it. (2 Chron. 24:7.)
2. *A Great Covenant Made.*
Jehoiada introduced it.
Pledged to be God's people.
3. *Destruction of Baal Worship.*
The people enlisted; enthusiasm.
It is not enough to hate evil.
4. *Reorganization and Restoration of Temple Services.*
2 Chron. 23:18, 19.
5. *Motive Good but Method Bad.*
Priests slow; selfish.
Money and confidence too meager—gifts came slowly.
6. *A Better Method Succeeds Well.*
Joy and enthusiasm in giving.
Importance of cheerful giving.
Value of method to-day.
7. *Success and Failure of Josiah.*
Under Jehoiada successful.

Later led by bad counsellors.
 He restored Baal and Ashtaroth.
 He was ungrateful and slew Zechariah,
 son of his benefactor. 2 Chron.
 24:22.

Lesson 5.—April 30.

GOD'S PITY FOR THE HEATHEN.

1. *The Universal Father.*
 God loved Nineveh! Pitied it.
 God has always loved the world.
 His universal salvation offered fully in
 Christ. Jews misunderstood his
 character; thought him theirs only.
 Jesus' regard for Gentiles offended
 them.
2. *The Unwilling, Narrow Prophet.*
 At the first call ran away.
 After sore sorrow obeyed only accord-
 ing to the letter of the command-
 ment.
 Sat down to see the city destroyed.
 Chided God for his too great mercy.
 Justified his own disobedience.
 Hated the heathen city greatly.
3. *God's Object Lesson in the Gourd.*
 Jonah delighted in the gourd.
 Thus many delight in transient pos-
 sessions for their honor and com-
 fort. He was selfish, weak.
 The worm made him wish to die.
 Our comforts should be above the de-
 struction of worms.
 If the gourd be dear to Jonah, how
 much dearer is Nineveh to God.
4. *Three Great Lessons.*

1. Jonah a sign to Ninevites (Matt.
 12:39).
2. Ninevites may condemn us (Matt.
 12:40).
 Men judged according to their light.
3. God's great desire to save the
 heathen. He commands us to go.
 Are we, like Jonah, unwilling, de-
 lighting in our comforts?

Lesson 6.—May 7.

UZZIAH, KING OF JUDAH, HUMBLLED.

1. *His Reign Begins Well, Ends Ill.*
 Young—16; popular and prospered.

2. *Secret of Success. He set Himself to
 Seek God.*

As long as he sought God, God made
 him to prosper. Trust in God was the
 key of success.

- A faithful teacher was Zechariah, hav-
 ing understanding in the wisdom of
 God. A great blessing.

3. *Certain Striking Features of Success.*
 Prospered against enemies.
 Prospered in building.
 Prospered in possessions—cattle; hus-
 bandry.
 Prospered in well equipped army.
 Prospered with long reign.

4. *Pride Caused his Downfall—Led to
 Other Sins.*

He usurped the sacred function of the
 priest.

Some toil upward to success; then
 grow dizzy and cast themselves from
 the pinnacle.

His undoing was not the fruit of a
 single day.

He doubtless was not conscious of sore
 danger.

Sin is deceitful. It was more disas-
 trous than he thought. His sin was
 one of desperate profanity.

5. *The Servants of God Must Withstand
 Wicked Kings.*

All men are accountable in God's sight.

6. *The Holy Presence of God Brings Out
 Sin and Makes Sinners Miserable in
 God's Company.* Rev. 6:15, 16

Lesson 7.—May 14.

ISAIAH'S VISION AND CALL.

1. *The Dark Background.*
 Vanity, fading national glory.
 The destroying tooth of sin.
 Human frailty and guilt.
2. *The One Supreme Object.*
 The one Hope—The Lord lifted up.
3. *Becoming Conduct of Angels.*
 Holy, Holy, Holy Lord.
 Veil their faces and feet.

Praise God in anthems.

Obeys, reverence, serve, ministry.

4. *Consciousness of Awful Sin.*

Unclean Lips; universal uncleanness.

Sin hinders hope, restrains joy and unfits one for service to God.

5. *The Lord's Perfect Cleansing.*

Ministry of angels. Burning love.

Love cleanses. Effectual cure.

Isaiah cleansed to serve.

6. *The Ringing Call For Service.*

"Who will go for us"—must volunteer.

Answered by the cleansed prophet.

Many, many needed to-day—cleansed of God.

7. *Fidelity, Patience, Heroism, Love, Needed.*

Stewards must be faithful—if not great.

Servants must have Master's Spirit.

Soldiers of the cross must endure hardness and be ready to suffer long.

Lesson 8.—May 21.

THE SONG OF THE VINEYARD.

1. *The Lord's Chosen People His Vineyard.*

Carefully planted in fruitful hill.

Providentially protected and guided.

Cultivated and refreshed daily by him.

It is expected to bring forth good fruit.

It brings forth wild grapes—avarice, drunkenness, injustice, pride, hardness.

2. *God Will Not Be Blamed For Failure.*

He hath given life, light, opportunity.

Compare Luke 19:20-24; Compare 2 Cor. 8:12.

The one talent must be used as also the five.

3. *Three Great Sins and Woes Pointed Out.*

1. The Sin of Avarice—wide-spread, deadly.

2. The Sin of Drunkenness—and of drinking.

The implied sin of making others drunk.

3. The Sin of Hardening the Heart.

4. *Hope Through Repentance.*

The angels rejoice when sinners repent.

The sin of sins is impenitence.

The goodness of God leads to repentance.

There is no appeal—no argument—like the cross, the suffering, loving Christ to lead the people to repentance.

Read Isaiah 55:7.

Lesson 9.—May 28.

PICTURE OF UNIVERSAL PEACE.

1. *The Glory of Judaism was Future.*

Notwithstanding sins, errors, failures of Israel it had a great and precious promise. That was Christ.

The chosen place was Jerusalem. 4:1-2.

2. *The Peace of the World is Christ.*

He is our Peace, says Paul. Eph. 2:14. The message at his birth was, "Peace on earth; good will among men."

At first he brought a sword—Matt. 10:34

"Come unto me . . . and I will give you rest." "Peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. In me you shall have peace."

3. *He is First Righteousness, Then Peace.*

Heb. 7:2—Righteousness, peace.

He is made unto us Righteousness. 1 Cor. 1:30.

"The Lord our Righteousness." Jer. 23:6

4. *The Best Way to Advance Peace Among All Nations is to Preach Christ Among All Nations.*

A majority of peaceful, peace-loving citizens can eliminate war.

"The peace-makers called sons of God."

Lesson 10.—June 4.

ISRAEL'S PENITENCE AND GOD'S PARDON.

1. *God's Nature as Shown in Hosea.*

Same then as now. But not understood.

Jonah was offended at God's mercy.
See Jonah 4:2, Ex. 34:6.

2. *Prophet was God's Representative—
loving, suffering, pleading.*

So the church must suffer in God's place for sinful men today.

Oh, for a church prepared to love sinners, grieve over their sins and yet go forward in hope!

3. *Note the Kind of Offering God Wants and Accepts.*

The lips are required; not the lips only; but the heart also.

Men invited to come to the very heart of God Himself.

4. *All Love of God and Men is Vain to Sinners if they will not Accept it.*

Jesus wept over Jerusalem. The trouble was that they "would not."

Although God so loved the world that he gave his Son for it, all will perish who reject or neglect his great salvation. "Whosoever will may come." But will men come?

Lesson 11.—June 11.

HEZEKIAH AND HIS PASSOVER.

1. *Hezekiah One of the Best Kings.*

Ranks with David and Josiah.

Bad father, good mother.

Good prophet, Isaiah, for teacher.

2. *The Great Work before Him.*

Dreadful idolatry; Temple doors closed; worship discontinued; house decaying.

Country desolate; cities burned; strangers devouring the land; people in sin and despair.

3. *Great Revival Conducted in Jerusalem.*

Temple cleansed; repaired; services restored.

Sin offerings and burnt offerings restored.

Consecration; confession; free-will offerings.

4. *Great Passover Planned.*

Great Invitation extended to Israel.

Great series of meetings held.

Instruction provided for people.

Great destruction of idolatry.

Regular support of worship provided.

Recognition of *unity* of Israel.

Reception accorded invitation.

5. *National Prosperity Followed Reform.*

"God was with him;" "prospered." 2 Kings 18:7.

"Many brought gifts to Hezekiah" 2 Chron. 32:23.

People failed to rally to his faith in God.

Nation must be carried into captivity.

Lesson 12.—June 18.

THE DOWNFALL OF SAMARIA.

1. *True Philosophy of History.*

Causes men would see and name.

Causes God gives for downfall.

2. *Features of the Culmination.*

Increasing weakness at home.

Incursion from abroad.

The captivity described.

3. *Prominent Personal Agents in Downfall.*

Jeroboam, Ahab, Jezebel and others.

Patriots and statesmen—Elijah, Elisha etc.

Place of idolatry in decline of the nation.

4. *Although Nations Sin and Perish, God's Purposes shall still go on to Fulfillment.*

The sky was full of promise in a coming Deliverer and Great King.

ORDER OF EXERCISES.

TEWART—November 17—Commentary.

Lesson Commentary, Third Quarter—Order of Exercises.

By J. Wilburn Rose, State Bible School Superintendent of New Mexico.

Song of Praise, school standing.

Prayer by Pastor, closing with Lord's Prayer in concert.

Devotional Hymn.

Show of Bibles.

Reading of a Psalm or other Old Testament selection.

Roll call of officers and teachers by Secretary, each quietly standing in response to his name.

Prayer by the Superintendent for officers and teachers, while they stand. School remains seated with bowed heads.

Song of Praise.

Reading of the lesson from the Bible.

Move to class-rooms. Gong signal by Assistant Superintendent or chord on piano by pianist.

First signal. School rises.

Second signal. Face to march.

March by piano or orchestra while divisions change places, as follows: Beginners, Primaries, Juniors and Intermediates, followed by Department Superintendents and teachers, to separate class-rooms. Adult Department in two divisions, young people and older people to main room or other convenient locality.

Recitation of the Lesson.

Signal for Closing.

Reassemble.

First signal, rise to march.

Second signal, face. March by orchestra or piano while classes move to original places.

Third signal, be seated.

Song of Praise.

Supplemental work or review by Superintendent.

Report of Department Superintendents, given verbally. Written report and collection in envelope sent to Secretary's desk by a pupil of the division.

Announcements.

Secretary's report. Total attendance and collection.

Benediction.

1911—THIRD QUARTER.—1911

Lesson I.

July 2

ISAIAH'S PROPHECY CONCERNING SENNACHERIB.

Is. 37:14-38. (Print vs. 21-38.)

GOLDEN TEXT—God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble
Ps. 46:1.

Memory Verses—33-35. **Suggested Reading**—Isa. 36, 37. **Time**—701 B. C.
Persons—Hezekiah, Isaiah, Sennacherib, Adrammelech, Sharezer and Esarhaddon.
Places—Jerusalem, Nineveh and land of Ararat.

DAILY READINGS.

June 26....M—Isaiah 37:14-38; 2 Kings 19:20-37; 2 Chron. 32:20-23.—Isaiah's Prophecy Concerning Sennacherib.
June 27....T—2 Chron. 32:1-8—"With us is the Lord our God to help us."
June 28....W—2 Chron. 32:9-19—The Defense of Sennacherib.
June 29....T—Isaiah 36:1-20—Boastful Speech of the Rabshakeh.
June 30....F—Isaiah 37:1-7—Hezekiah Interceding with God.
July 1.....S—Isaiah 37:8-13—Final Warning of the Rabshakeh.
July 2.....S—Isaiah 38:1-22—God Hears Hezekiah's Prayer.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Nineveh. See notes on lesson for April 30.

Land of Ararat. Ararat is the Hebrew equivalent of the modern Armenia and

the Authorized Version so translates it. The murderers of Sennacherib fled into the rolling, mountainous region which lies to the north of Assyria proper.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

In the year 721 B. C. Samaria fell, and with that event the history of the northern kingdom and the ten tribes comes to an end. Judah was thus left the sole heir to all the promises of God, and henceforth all of the divine purposes are to be carried out through her alone. The occasion, the character, and the policy of Hezekiah have been studied in the les-

son for June 11. He served Jehovah and was a faithful adherent to all of the divine regulations as to life and worship. Isaiah, who was at this time in the full vigor of his prophetic powers, was the adviser of Hezekiah, though sometimes the influence of opposing political factions was too strong for him. Internally this was the bane of Judean politics. It was disturbed by the strife of contending

parties, and this prevented the adoption of a uniform and settled policy. Isaiah bears witness to the vices and luxury of the land. The fall of Samaria, no doubt, had a sobering effect upon Judah, but the influence of this wore off and the luxury-loving inhabitants of Jerusalem returned to their search for wealth and pleasure. Sargon, king of Assyria, did not molest Hezekiah in his campaigns at the time of his capture of Samaria, for Hezekiah seems to have taken no part in the alliances and attempts to throw off the Assyrian yoke. Almost a decade passed in which there was no revolt against Assyria, and when the next uprising came, which was in the year 711, Ashdod alone revolted and was subdued by an officer sent by Sargon (Isa. 20:1). Six years later Sargon died and Sennacherib succeeded him, and this was the signal for a general uprising on the part of all the petty states of Syria and Palestine. Hezekiah seems to have been a leader in this movement. The pro-Egyptian party controlled the policy of the court, and Isaiah denounced them for trusting in Egypt. At this time Hezekiah fortified Jerusalem more strongly and improved its water supply (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chron. 32:30). These revolts against his authority had to be suffered for a time by Sennacherib, for there were uprisings nearer home, which first demanded his attention. In 703 B. C. he crushed the revolt in Babylon and the next year asserted his authority in Media. His third campaign was in 701 B. C. and was against Phœnicia and Palestine. The former was quickly subdued, and then Sennacherib overran the Philistine cities and defeated a great force at Eltekeh. He was then free to turn against Jerusalem. He himself gives an account of this campaign and its results. He asserts or implies that he conquered Judah and overthrew all of its principal cities,

except Jerusalem. He came to Jerusalem, but he does not say that he either besieged or captured it. He did exact a heavy duty from Hezekiah, but it seems that he departed for Nineveh before it was collected. The reason for this sudden departure he does not give. The Bible has accounts of this campaign in two places, but they are evidently from the same pen. One is found in 2 Kings 18:13-19:37, and it has been copied into Isaiah 36:1-37:38. Hezekiah sent to Sennacherib at Lachish, where the latter was carrying on a siege, proffering submission, and paid the tribute which the latter demanded. Later Sennacherib sent officers to ask the surrender of the city. He must have taken alarm at something he saw or heard, giving him reason to suspect Hezekiah of treachery. A long parley took place between the Assyrian legates and the servants of Hezekiah, but the former departed without receiving any promise of the surrender of the city. Their boasting words did, however, produce consternation in the breasts of Hezekiah and his servants. They appealed to Isaiah, who gave them assurance that Sennacherib should hear a rumor and return to his own land and that there he should fall by an assassin's hand. Later Sennacherib heard that Tirhakah, the Ethiopian king of Egypt, was coming against him with an army, and he made yet another effort to secure the surrender of Hezekiah before the decisive battle with his great foe should be fought. He wrote a letter to Hezekiah, hoping, no doubt, by this means to reach the confidences of Hezekiah more effectively than he had by sending legates. The letter was received by king Hezekiah, and with it in hand he proceeded to the house of Jehovah, that he might lay it and its demand before the Lord in prayer. The coming of Isaiah, as told in the lesson, is the divine answer to this prayer.

21 Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent unto Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, Whereas thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria, 22 this is the word which Jehovah hath spoken concerning him: The virgin daughter of Zion hath despised thee and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee. 23 Whom hast thou defied and blasphemed? and against whom hast thou exalted thy voice and lifted

up thine eyes on high? *even* against the Holy One of Israel. 24 By thy servants hast thou defied the Lord, and hast said, With the multitude of my chariots am I come up to the height of the mountains, to the innermost parts of Lebanon; and I will cut down the tall cedars thereof; and the choice fir-trees thereof; and I will enter into its farthest height, the forest of its fruitful field; 25 I have digged and drunk water, and with the sole of my feet will I dry up all the rivers of Egypt.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 21. Isaiah the son of Amoz: Chapters 36-39 of the book of Isaiah are copied from the book of Kings. Since, in the latter book, his name is mentioned for the first time in this incident his full title is here given. **Thou hast prayed, etc.:** The prayer is given in vs. 16-20. He had prayed that Jehovah should save him from Sennacherib.

22. Concerning him: The first part of Isaiah's message (vs. 22-29) is actually addressed to Sennacherib, as well as concerning him. It is in the form of poetry. **The virgin:** Jerusalem is called a virgin because since David's time, when the Israelites came into possession of it, the city had never been in the hands of its foes. Cf. Jer. 14:17; Lam. 2:13. The term expresses the high esteem in which Jehovah held it. **Daughter of Zion:** Zion was the hill on which Jerusalem was built, hence the population of Zion was metaphorically the daughter. **Daughter of Zion . . . of Jerusalem:** Hebrew parallelism. **Shaken her head at thee:** A gesture of scorn and railery. The past tense of the verb is used because the prophets often vividly pictured a future event by means of past tenses. This is an intimation that Sennacherib shall suffer discomfiture before Jerusalem.

23. Whom hast thou defied? etc.: Sennacherib believed that he was defying Jerusalem, but instead it was the God of that city whom he defied. **Lifted up thine eyes on high:** Jehovah was the Most High, and hence to look at him insolently indicated excessive arrogance.

24. By thy servants: Rabshakeh and his companions. Cf. Isa. 36:4, 13. **Lebanon:** This mountain region was recognized as possessing great beauty and as being practically inaccessible. To scale its height, to penetrate its recesses, to fell its great trees, and to ravage its fertile dells seemed the very height of human achievement. For Sennacherib to boast that he could do these things meant that there was no part of the holy land which could resist him.

25. I have digged, etc.: The corresponding passage in Kings has "strange waters." Hezekiah had stopped all fountains and water sources near Jerusalem to deprive the Assyrians of a supply (2 Chron. 32:34). Sennacherib's retort to this is that he has and can again dig wells and thus procure for himself strange waters. **Dry up the rivers of Egypt:** Warfare was difficult in Judah because of the scarcity of water; in Egypt because of its abundance. In the one, Sen-

26 Hast thou not heard how I have done it long ago, and formed it of ancient times? now have I brought it to pass, that it should be thine to lay waste fortified cities into ruinous heaps. 27 Therefore their inhabitants were of small power, they were dismayed and confounded; they were as the grass of the field, and as the green herb, as the grass on the housetops, and as a field of grain before it is grown up. 28 But I know thy sitting down, and thy going out, and thy coming in, and thy raging against me. 29 Because of thy raging against me, and because thine arrogancy is come up into mine ears, therefore will

I put my hook in thy nose, and my bridle in thy lips, and I will turn thee back by the way by which thou camest.

30 And this shall be the sign unto thee: ye shall eat this year that which groweth of itself, and in the second year that which springeth of the same; and in the third year sow ye, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat the fruit thereof. 31 And the remnant that is escaped of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward. 32 For out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and out of mount Zion they that shall escape. The zeal of Jehovah of hosts will perform this.

nacherib boasts he can procure water, and in the other dry it up. Thus he can overcome all obstacles.

26-29. In these verses God tells Sennacherib that he is only a divine instrument, and what he is now doing was long ago purposed and ordained in the divine counsels. This same doctrine is taught in Isa. 10:4-19.

26. I have done it . . . and formed it: God says to Sennacherib, "Have you not heard how I protected Israel and brought it to greatness? Its history should teach you that it is under my protection." Now have I brought it to pass, etc.: By God's own wish and purpose Israel's history is to be reversed, and now it is to be ruined, and God has chosen Sennacherib to do this. This king did overrun the country places and smaller cities of Judah, but not Jerusalem.

27. Therefore: Because God gave Sennacherib permission and power to lay Judah waste, and not because, as Sennacherib thought, he had so great power. They were as the grass, etc.: Figures to denote frailty and impotence. The grass on the housetops: The grass which after a rain would spring up on the thatched or earth roof of houses, but

"which withereth before it groweth up" (Ps. 129:6).

28. God knows all the movements and the thoughts of Sennacherib. His boasts over Jerusalem God takes as boasts against himself.

29. Because of thy raging, etc.: Since God knows and has taken note of Sennacherib's boast, he will stop his mad career. My hook in thy nose: He is compared to a wild beast, which has been turned loose, but when he begins to abuse his liberty, and to destroy, his owner subdues and confines him again. I will turn thee back: He was not to go to Egypt as he boasted.

30-35. These verses are addressed to Hezekiah.

30. The sign: Pointed to disturbance from the war, which should last through two summers, but after that should come a long period of peace and security. The disturbance, however, was not to be so great but that they could reap and consume the volunteer growth.

31. Further evidence that there should follow a period of peace and prosperity.

32. Isaiah's great doctrine was that, though the nation might be cruelly oppressed, it should not be utterly de-

33 Therefore thus saith Jehovah concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come unto this city, nor shoot an arrow there, neither shall he come before it with shield, nor cast up a mound against it. 34 By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and he shall not come unto this city, saith Jehovah. 35 For I will defend this city to save it,

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stroyed. A remnant should be saved. **The zeal of Jehovah, etc.:** God's zeal for Israel is guarantee that this will be performed.

33. **Therefore:** Because of God's zeal and because it is his purpose to save a remnant. **He shall not, etc.:** He shall not approach it, engage in pitched battle with its defenders nor besiege it. There is no record of Sennacherib coming nearer Jerusalem than Libnah and Lachish.

34. This is a repetition and amplification of the last part of verse 29.

35. Two reasons are given why he should defend Jerusalem: (1) for his own

for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.

36 And the angel of Jehovah went forth, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians a hundred and fourscore and five thousand; and when men arose early in the morning, behold, these were all dead bodies.

sake, that is, in order that through this city he might have a witness to all the world; (2) for David's sake, that is, because of his promise to David.

36. **And the angel of the Lord, etc.:** The account in Kings says "that night." **And smote, etc.:** The Chronicler mentions the loss of the leaders. They probably died of the plague. See Comments.

37. **Dwelt at Nineveh:** Since he was shorn of his power. He did not die till quite twenty years later.

38. **Nisrock:** This god is otherwise unknown. Josephus has Arasce. Probably the next is corrupt. **Esarhaddon:** He reigned from 681 to 668 B. C.

COMMENTS.

A Vindication of Jehovah's Power. The historian in this passage represents Jehovah as directly interposing to save Jerusalem from doom. Yet only twenty years before another city had been besieged by this same Assyrian host, a city that no less than Jerusalem contained descendants of the patriarchs whom God had chosen. Yet nothing was done to spare Samaria. No Angel of Death "breathed in the face" of Sargon's host. Samaria went to its doom warned but unsuccored. Jerusalem, however, had prophetic assurances from the very beginning of Assyrian invasion that no harm should befall it. When Rabshakeh sought to sow the seeds of distrust and rebellion in the ranks of Hezekiah's army, Isaiah

affirmed that Assyria should hear a rumor and return to his own land (v. 7). Later he says that the king of Assyria "shall not come unto this city, nor shoot an arrow there, neither shall he come before it with shield, nor cast up a mound against it" (v. 33). At the opportune moment the Assyrian army was overthrown, not by the power of Hezekiah, but by Jehovah's own arm. Why this distinction between Samaria and Jerusalem? The narratives contain the reason. For Jehovah to have interposed in favor of Samaria would have been no vindication of Jehovah. Neither king nor people worshiped him to the exclusion of other gods. They were not putting trust in his might. But on the other hand, for Jehovah to

have failed to interpose on behalf of Jerusalem would have discredited him in the eyes of both Assyria and Jerusalem. Rabshakeh had declared that Jehovah was on the Assyrian side and that Hezekiah vainly trusted in him (36:7, 10). He even denied the power of Jehovah to deliver Jerusalem from the hand of the Assyrian king (36:15-20). But Hezekiah put his trust in Jehovah alone. He confesses him to be the only God (v. 16). Sennacherib has overcome other people, but it was because their gods were no gods (17-19). He prays that Jehovah may interpose in order that "all the kingdoms of the earth may know that thou art Jehovah" (v. 20). All the circumstances favored Jehovah's intervention in behalf of Jerusalem; and the destruction of the Assyrian army and the preservation of Jerusalem inviolate was a vindication of Isaiah's monotheism and of Jehovah's own might and power.

The Faith that Saved Jerusalem. Jerusalem was saved because its king and its inhabitants put trust in Him. It has been pointed out that failure to come to its rescue would have brought against God the natural charge of either inability or of indifference. It may be said with all reverence that Jehovah was compelled to come to his people's aid. To have failed would have discredited him. That which compelled him to take this step was faith, his people's trust in him. But there is a trust in Jehovah which does not impel God to come to the aid of his people. It is only the proper sort of faith which obtains the victory and overcomes the world. Micah denounced Jerusalem because "they lean upon Jehovah, and say, Is not Jehovah in the midst of us? No evil shall come upon us" (3:11). Isaiah says sarcastically of Jerusalem: "They call themselves of the holy city and say themselves upon the God of Israel" (48:2). Both prophets denounced a trust in Jehovah because it is a false trust. It was a vain trust, because it di-

vorced God and righteousness. It did not recognize the truth that God requires right being and right doing from his worshipers. The persons of whom Micah speaks, who were leaning upon Jehovah, were at the same time building Jerusalem with blood and violating all principles of justice. Their trust was blind, because they believed that God had so inseparably bound himself up with the fortunes of Jerusalem that he could not permit it to be destroyed. But circumstances may arise, and actually did arise, when God can vindicate his character and his holiness only by the destruction of Jerusalem. Hezekiah's faith, however, recognizes that apart from well-doing and faithful worship of Jehovah their faith has no claim upon his power. It was because there were some righteous persons found in Jerusalem that Sennacherib was overthrown.

A Deliverance from Jehovah. This deliverance of Jerusalem from the Assyrian host must have profoundly impressed Jerusalem, and Isaiah would not fail to impress it upon the people to whom he preached. Long ago he had declared that Assyria was only a rod in the hands of Jehovah, and that it should be overthrown when he had accomplished his purpose. (Isa. 10:4-11.) Ps. 48 and 68 and Isa. 33 all refer to this or some other manifest deliverance from some powerful enemy. In all of these passages thanksgiving is offered to God for the deliverance. In the fact that it came as a dispensation of Providence at a great crisis in Judah's history lies its wonderful impressiveness. Parallels have been found in the providential deliverances which have come to modern nations. The English not unnaturally point to the destruction of the Spanish Armada. "In the churches of Moscow the exultation over the fall of Sennacherib is still read on the anniversary of the retreat of the French from Russia." (Stanley.)

The Destruction of Sennacherib.

I.

The Assyrian came down like the wolf
on the fold,
And his cohorts were gleaming in purple
and gold;
And the sheen of their spears was like
stars on the sea,
When the blue wave rolls nightly on
deep Galilee.

II.

Like the leaves of the forest when Sum-
mer is green,
That host with their banners at sunset
were seen;
Like the leaves of the forest when Au-
tumn hath blown,
That host on the morrow lay wither'd
and strown.

III.

For the angel of Death spread his wings
on the blast,
And breathed in the face of the foe as
he pass'd;
And the eyes of the sleepers wax'd dead-
ly and chill;
And their hearts but once heaved, and
forever grew still!

IV.

And there lay the steed with his nostril
all wide,
But through it there roll'd not the breath
of his pride;
And the foam of his gasping lay white
on the turf,
And cold as the spray of the rock-beat-
ing surf.

V.

And the widows of Ashur are loud in
their wail,
And the idols were broke in the temple
of Baal;
And the might of the Gentile, unsmote
by the sword,
Hath melted like snow in the glance
of the Lord!

—Byron.

Other Accounts of This Disaster.—

“For details of this disaster we look in vain, of course, to the Assyrian annals, which only record Sennacherib's abrupt return to Nineveh. But it is remarkable that the histories of both of his chief rivals in this campaign, Judah and Egypt, should contain independent reminiscences of so sudden and miraculous a disaster to his host. From Egyptian sources there has come down through Herodotus a story that a king of Egypt, being deserted by the military caste, when Sennacherib, king of the Arabs and Assyrians, invaded his country, entered his sanctuary and appealed with weeping to his god; that the god appeared and cheered him; that he raised an army of artisans and marched to meet Sennacherib in Pelusium; that by night a multitude of field mice ate up the quivers, bow-strings and shield-strap of the Assyrians; and that, as these fled on the morrow, very many of them fell. . . . The parallel with the Bible narrative is close. In both accounts it is a prayer of the king that prevails. In both the Deity sends his agent—in the grotesque Egyptian an army of mice, in the sublime Jewish his angel. In both the effects are sudden, happening in a single night. From the Assyrian side we have this corroboration: that Sennacherib did abruptly return to Nineveh without taking Jerusalem or meeting with Tirhakah, and that, though he reigned for twenty years more, he never again made a Syrian campaign. . . . The neighborhood in which the Assyrian army suffered this great disaster was notorious in antiquity for its power of pestilence. Making every allowance for the untutored imagination of the ancients, we must admit the Serbonian bog, between Syria and Egypt, to have been a place terrible for filth and miasma. The noxious vapors traveled far; but the plagues, with which this swamp several times desolated the world, were first engendered among the

diseased and demoralized populations whose villages festered upon its margin. A Persian army was decimated here in the middle of the fourth century before Christ. "The fatal disease which depop-

ulated the earth in the time of Justinian and his successors first appeared in the neighborhood of Pelusium, between the Serbonian bog and the eastern channel of the Nile." (Geo. A. Smith.)

THE LESSON STORY.

One of the great events in the reign of Hezekiah was the destruction of Sennacherib's army.

Sennacherib was one of the most splendid and most powerful of all the kings of Assyria. He was a son of the great conqueror, Sargon, who had pressed to a successful issue the siege of Samaria, and carried away captive king Hoshea, and the Ten Tribes of Israel. "His predominant characteristic was an over-weening pride and arrogance, which shows itself in all his inscriptions." He calls himself "the Great King, the Noble Hero, the Favorite of the Great Gods, the Punisher of Unbelievers, the Destroyer of Wicked Men." In sculpture he is represented as seated on a throne, holding in his right hand two arrows, while his left grasps the bow; on either brawny arm is a rich bracelet and upon his head the jeweled pyramidal crown of Assyria. He is superbly robed, and his throne covered with rare tapestries. His heavy locks fall on his broad shoulders, the long, curled beard flows over his breast, and his strongly marked features wear an expression of extreme haughtiness. It was to this mighty ruler that Hezekiah, through the foolish and vain policy of his father, Ahaz, had become a vassal, and to whom he paid heavy tribute. In an effort to gratify the insatiable greed of the Assyrians, and secure from him a promise of safety to Jerusalem, even the consecrated vessels of the temple had been sacrificed. Yet in spite of this costly ransom, only a temporary relief was granted, for soon a messenger was sent to Hezekiah demanding the immediate surrender of the city. The words of

menace, thundered in the ears of the king's three servants before the city wall by Sennacherib's chief captain, were in the Hebrew tongue, that they might also reach and terrify the people. But they met the arrogant and impious challenge with perfect silence, for the king had commanded them "not to answer him." The Rabshakeh's threat was soon followed by a letter from Sennacherib himself, warning Hezekiah against the folly of trusting in his God for deliverance. In this crisis, the king rent his clothes, put on sackcloth, went into the temple, and humbly sought Jehovah's help. He "spread" Sennacherib's letter, so full of empty boastings and wicked blasphemies "before the Lord." He also sent his servants and the elders to Isaiah, beseeching his prayers and intercessions for the city. Quickly they returned with words of radiant hope. Hezekiah's prayer had been heard by Jehovah of hosts, and answered through his prophet. Jerusalem, "the virgin daughter of Zion," was to be rescued from the grasp of the Assyrian, his great army utterly destroyed, and he, like a wild beast held in check by "hook and bridle," led back to his own country. In a single night the calamity fell, which drove Sennacherib from Syria forever. The details of this great disaster are not given. Only this is said, "The angel of Jehovah went forth that night and smote in the camp of Assyria, one hundred and eighty-five thousand," and the morning sun shone down upon the great host of lifeless warriors. Sennacherib returned in ignominious defeat to Nineveh, and after a few years was murdered in the temple of his god by his own sons.

The glorious deliverance which came to Jerusalem through the faith and courage of Hezekiah, caused him to be "magnified in the sight of all nations." He was reckoned one of the three perfect kings of Judah (2 Kings 18:5), the other two being David and Josiah. "His reign

of twenty-nine years presents an unparalleled picture of persevering warfare against the most intricate and difficult circumstances, and of glorious victory." At his death all Jerusalem and Judah mourned, and he was buried in the sepulcher of his fathers.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What, from God's view, caused the downfall of Samaria?
2. For how long had the kingdom stood and under how many kings?
3. What notoriously wicked queen helped to lead the nation to Baal worship?
4. What great blunder did the first

king, Jeroboam, make?

5. At the hands of what nation was Israel destroyed?

6. Which of the two kingdoms—Israel or Judah—was the more wicked?

7. Name some of the faithful prophets in the kingdom of Israel.

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. When Hezekiah was distressed at Rabshakeh's speech (Isa. 36) where did he go and to whom did he send? Isa. 37:1, 2.

2. What cheering message did Isaiah return unto Hezekiah? Isa. 37:5-7.

3. What word did the messenger of Assyria bring to Hezekiah? Isa. 37:8-13.

4. What then did Hezekiah do with the letter from the messengers? Isa. 37:14.

5. What four expressions did Hezekiah use in speaking to Jehovah before asking him to incline his ears to hear? Isa. 37:15, 16.

6. What did Hezekiah ask the Lord to see and hear? Isa. 37:17.

7. What did Hezekiah freely admit in his prayer? Isa. 37:18, 19.

8. What reason did he assign for the success of the kings of Assyria in overthrowing the nations named and their gods? Isa. 37:19.

9. On what special ground did Hezekiah made his request? Isa. 37:20.

10. What message did Isaiah then send unto Hezekiah? Isa. 37:21-29.

11. Against whom had Sennacherib exalted himself and whom defied? Isa. 37:23.

12. What did Isaiah represent the Lord as saying as to his knowledge of the king of Assyria? Isa. 37:28.

13. What particular quality in the king of Assyria did the Lord rebuke? Isa. 37:29.

14. What was promised concerning the remnant of Judah? Isa. 37:31, 32.

15. What good news did the Lord speak concerning the king of Assyria and his inability to enter Jerusalem? Isa. 37:33.

16. What did the Lord say he would do for the city, and why? Isa. 37:35.

17. What marvelous overthrow came to the army of Assyria? Isa. 37:36.

18. Where did Sennacherib go and how did he die? Isa. 37:37, 38.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

How different does God appear in the Old Testament from the New! In the Old, nations are destroyed for their wickedness.

In the New, the wicked nations are to be evangelized. In the Old Testament, Jerusalem is the Lord's peculiar de-

light. In the New Testament his church, or his kingdom of spiritual priests, is the very apple of his eye. But it is not the contrast between God in the Old and God in the New Testament—God is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever—so much as it is the difference between the revelation then and the revelation now, that should impress us. God was not known in the Old Testament dispensation as he is made known to us in Christ. To see God in the face of Jesus Christ is very different from seeing him in the clouds and under the best conceptions of the Old Testament prophets and historians. Men understand God only as they see in him qualities corresponding to qualities in themselves. Hence their conceptions of him change as they change, and can never be perfect until they shall be made perfect and, as John says, "Saall see him as he is." Jesus was both a revelation of God and of the possibilities of our nature under his grace.

The Old Testament does not, could not, present to us a perfect likeness of Jehovah. That is found only in Christ. And even as presented in him we can not

fully comprehend it. He is too great for us. But we see in Christ those inspiring and gracious glories which were only dimly seen before Christ came. We follow on that we may know him. The real God of Moses and David, Israel and Hosea, is revealed in Christ. We must read the Old through the New Testament. In the Old Testament the foes of men were reckoned as armies and nations of men. In the New, under the blaze of Jesus' character and instruction, our foes are evils in human nature to be defeated and overcome. We wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against spiritual wickedness. Hence our armor is the word of God adjusted to our character (Eph. 6:10-16).

It is true that God will help us now, as he helped the Jews who trusted in him, against our outward enemies if we will serve and trust him; that he will help us now as he helped the Jews in outward success and prosperity; but through Christ we have learned that our greatest and most deadly foes are spiritual foes, and our real prosperity is in becoming Christlike.

THE SUFFERING SERVANT OF JEHOVAH.

Is. 52:13-53:12.

GOLDEN TEXT—Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all. Isaiah 53:6.

Memory Verses 4-6. Suggested Readings—42:1-9; 49:1-13; 50:4-11. Time—Unknown. Persons—The servant of Jehovah and the speaker, a man or men of his generation.

DAILY READINGS.

July 3..... M—Isaiah 52:13-53:12—The Suffering Servant of Jehovah.
 July 4..... T—Isaiah 42:1-9—"A Bruised Reed Will He not Break."
 July 5..... W—Isaiah 49:1-13—"They Shall not Hunger nor Thirst."
 July 6..... T—Isaiah 50:4-11—"I Hid not my Face from Shame."
 July 7..... F—Matt. 12:15-21—"A Bruised Reed Shall He not Break."
 July 8..... S—John 6:22-35—He that Cometh unto Me Shall Never Hunger.
 July 9..... S—Matt. 26:36-46—The Servant Drinking the Father's Cup.

THE SERVANT OF JEHOVAH.

In the latter half of the book of Isaiah there are four passages which describe God's ideal servant, and the one which constitutes our lesson is the fourth. It is necessary to say God's *ideal* servant, for there are other passages which describe his actual servant Israel, and these serve as the starting point for the prophet's description of the ideal servant. In interpreting these passages scholars are much given to the discussion of the question whether the servant is a person or a personification. In 41:8 God says, "Thou Israel, my servant." When in 42:1 he says again, "Behold, my servant whom I uphold," does he refer also to the nation, or does he refer to only a fragment of the nation, or has he passed to the contemplation of some

great figure, such as, according to Christian belief, the Messiah? Passages may be cited, as they are cited by interpreters, in support of each one of these three explanations. There is less ground for doubt in this passage than in the others. He is thinking of the nation in 41:8, in 44:1 and 44:21, but throughout chapter fifty-three the reference is individual. The servant is always spoken of in the singular and is never identified with Israel. The prophet begins with the conception that Israel is the servant of Jehovah, but it has actually come far short of its mission. From this failure because of sin and weakness, the prophet rises to the thought of one who will not fail, since he is perfect, the ideal servant of the Lord.

JESUS OF NAZARETH THE REALIZATION OF THIS IDEAL.

There has been one person only in all of the history of the human race who has achieved this ideal, and that one person is Jesus of Nazareth. There is no need, however, to insist that the prophet was thinking and writing of him only. He was

describing the ideal servant of Jehovah, and wherever there is a servant of the Lord and in whatever century he may live this servant must conform to some of the elements which make up the prophet's description of the ideal servant,

God is served ever by his servants' suffering and toiling on behalf of others. Jesus laid this down as a prime condition of discipleship to him. The greatest in his kingdom is to be the servant of all. In this and in other respects other servants of Jesus may approximate the ideal servant described in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah. But he only leaves no part unfulfilled. He has been the only

one who in some respect has not departed from the ideal here outlined. The correspondence between the actual life of Jesus and the ideal depicted by the prophet shows that they were actuated and controlled by the same spirit. It shows further, that a unity more than the mere mechanical runs through the Bible and the effort of God on man's behalf.

THE LITERARY FORM.

This description of the servant of Jehovah is cast in the form of poetry and by most interpreters is divided into five strophes of three verses each. Its composition shows a high order of literary skill. The opening line of each strophe contains one or two words which summarize the thought of that strophe and is in a sense a title to it. The servant

never speaks himself in the poem. He is named in the first line and in v. 11 only. Elsewhere he is spoken of as *he*. We never see nor hear himself. "But all the more solemnly he is there: a shadow upon countless faces, a grievous memory on the hearts of the speakers. He so haunts all we see and all we hear, that we feel it is no art, but conscience that speaks of him."

IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

Before passing to a verse-by-verse study of this wonderful passage it may be well to take notice of the frequency of the allusion in the New Testament to this idea of the servant of the Lord. John can scarcely have been uninfluenced by this passage when he hailed Jesus as "the Lamb of God." Matthew quotes chapter 53, "Himself bare our sickness,"

and from chapter 42, "Behold my servant . . . he shall not strive." He described himself as a servant, and in the early chapters of Acts this was a favorite title for him. Phillip in Acts 8; Peter in his first Epistle; and Paul in Rom. 15 and 2 Cor. 5, quote and apply portions of Isa. 53 to the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth.

THE OTHER PASSAGES.

The first passage which describes the ideal servant (42:1-9) tells of his elevation, his equipment, his mission, the tenderness, unobtrusiveness and constancy with which he carries out his work, and the complete success with which it is crowned. In the second passage (49:1-13) the servant himself speaks of his failure in the past and his sense of disappointment at the fruitlessness of his

effort, yet he has received a new revelation and is confident that he shall carry God's salvation to the ends of the earth. In the third passage (50:4-11) the servant again speaks and describes his communion with God, his acceptance of persecution and his confident belief in the final victory of God's righteous cause. In our lesson he is presented as the man of sorrow, the meek and patient martyr and the sin-bearer.

13 Behold, my servant shall deal wisely, he shall be exalted and lifted up, and shall be very high. 14 Like as many were astonished at thee (his visage was so marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men), 15 so shall he sprinkle many nations; kings shall shut their mouths at him: for that

which had not been told them shall they see; and that which they had not heard shall they understand.

1 Who hath believed our message? and to whom hath the arm of Jehovah been revealed? 2 For he grew up before him as a tender plant, and as a root out of a dry ground: he hath no form nor comeliness; and when we see him, there is

EXPLANATORY.

Verses 13-15. These verses represent Jehovah as speaking. His servant has occupied a very humble position and has been despised and degraded in the eyes of men. Now Jehovah announces that he shall be exalted to his true dignity and glory, and the effect will be to cause all the world to look upon him with astonishment and reverence.

13. **My servant shall deal wisely:** The marginal translation, *shall prosper*, seems to give the sense that best accords with the rest of the verse. **He shall be exalted**, etc.: Though formerly he had been looked upon with contempt. Cf. 50:6. The very words which are here used to describe the servant's exaltation are used to describe God in 57:15.

14. **Like as many**, etc.: The sentence commenced in this verse is completed in v. 15. The meaning is that to the same degree that many were astonished because of his suffering, to that same degree many nations shall be amazed at his exaltation. **His visage**, etc.: This clause is parenthetical and explains why they were astonished at the servant. It was because he was disfigured by disease. Hence they were astonished at him in the sense that they shrank from him in repugnance.

15. **Sprinkle many nations:** He shall sprinkle them in the sense of ceremonially cleansing them, as described in Lev. 4:6. This is the meaning of the

English translation. It is more likely that the margin is correct: *He shall startle many nations*. This is the rendering of the Septuagint. It suits better the general meaning of the sentence. **Kings shall shut their mouth at him:** Because of the reverence and awe which they feel for him. Job says that out of respect for him, "Princes refrained from talking and laid their hands on their mouths" (29:9). **That which had not been told**, etc.: The exaltation of the servant was more marvelous than anything of which they had formerly heard.

1. From this verse on to v. 10 the prophet is the speaker. He looks back on the sufferings of the servant as already past, and so he speaks in the past tense. He identifies himself with the men of his generation and represents himself as sharing in their acts and feelings. **Who hath believed? etc.:** The prophet here makes confession of universal unbelief of the revelation that God had made concerning his servant and of his divine power in the servant's tragic history. This unbelief had led all to misunderstand the servant.

2. The prophet, speaking for his people, gives the reason for their unbelief. He compares him first to a weak plant which was rooted in dry soil. Such a plant would not be attractive. So the servant had "no form nor comeliness." They found in him nothing that was de-

no beauty that we should desire him. 3 He was despised, and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and as one from whom men hide their face he was despised; and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows; yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. 5 But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes

we are healed. 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

7 He was oppressed, yet when he was afflicted he opened not his mouth; as a lamb that is led to the slaughter, and as a sheep that before its shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth. 8 By oppression and judgment he was taken away; and as for his generation, who *among them* considered that he was cut off out of the land of the living for the

sirable. It was natural, therefore, that they should not believe in him.

3. A further reason why they did not believe in him. Not only was he not attractive, but he was even positively repugnant. He had some loathsome disease that disfigured him. At the sight of him men hid their faces in horror. This suggests leprosy. Their unbelief was not at all strange. Who could think that such a being as this was the Servant of Jehovah?

4. In this verse begins the statement of the Servant's suffering. They thought that it was because he was the object of God's anger, but now they learn that it was because he was suffering vicariously for their unbelief. He hath borne . . . and carried: Primarily this means that he endured their griefs and sorrows, but he did this that he might remove them. Cf. Matt. 8:17. Hence he was the substitute for his people.

5. This verse gives the reason why the Servant was made their substitute. It was because the Servant's suffering was the penalty for the people's transgression. "He was wounded for our transgressions," etc. The second reason is because this was the remedy by which they were restored to health. "With his stripes we are healed." The chastisement of our peace: The chastisement

which produces peace. Such a chastisement as satisfies the claims of the law. That the people themselves also suffered is evident from the statement that they were healed, but their own suffering could not produce their peace.

6. Here there is (1) a confession of their own sins, and (2) a frank acknowledgment that the Servant's sufferings were imposed on him for their sakes. It is also implied that their former unbelief in the Servant and rejection of him were due to their heedlessness and callousness. His own way: The way of selfishness and individual interests.

7-9. In these verses the figure of sickness is changed to that of violence and injustice, though the two kinds of suffering are both referred to in v. 5. He was put to death and laid in a dishonored grave.

7. The injustice that was done him is described in general terms. He was oppressed and he was brought to slaughter. The prominent feature of the verse, however, is that under this harsh treatment he did not protest. He was meek and gentle. He uttered no word of complaint.

8. This verse contains three statements about him. The first amplifies the thought of the injustice done him. It was a legal procedure. His death was

transgression of my people to whom the stroke *was due*? 9 And they made his grave with the wicked, and with a rich man in his death; although he had done no violence, neither was any deceit in his mouth.

10 Yet it pleased Jehovah to bruise him; he hath put him to grief: when thou shalt make his soul an offering for sin, he shall see *his seed*, he shall prolong his days, and the pleasure of Jeho-

vah shall prosper in his hand. 11 He shall see of the travail of his soul, and shall be satisfied: by the knowledge of himself shall my righteous servant justify many; and he shall bear their iniquities. 12 Therefore will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong; because he poured out his soul unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors: yet he bare the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

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brought about by process of law, though it was by rank injustice and oppression. The second statement concerns the callousness and thoughtlessness of the men of his generation. No one took notice of his death. The third element of the verse returns to the thought of his vicarious suffering. The stroke by which he was afflicted was due the people, but he bore it.

9. The cruelty with which he was treated did not relax at his death, but pursued his body even to the grave. He was buried ignominiously in a grave among those of the outcasts and the notoriously wicked. To be buried among even the "common people" was, according to Jer. 26:23, a disgrace. **With a rich man in his death:** *Rich* is certainly to be taken as a term of reproach, synonymous with the *wicked*. The rich as a class were oppressive, and that is its meaning here as elsewhere; *the poor* means the pious. **Although he had done, etc.:** For the first and only time the sin-

lessness of the Servant is affirmed.

10. His suffering and death were by the will of God, because he was offered as a guilt offering. In return *he shall see his seed*, the true Israelites, who by means of his sacrifice were converted; *he shall prolong his days*, that is, enjoy a long life; *the pleasure* or purpose of *Jehovah*, which is the salvation of sinners, *shall prosper in his hand*. Take note that this verse implies a resurrection from the dead. From this point God is the speaker, and no longer the prophet.

11. **He shall see, etc.:** The idea is that he was contented, satisfied to bear his pain, since he could foresee the results of it. **By the knowledge, etc.:** By the knowledge of God which he possesses and communicates to others.

12. As a reward for his undeserved suffering, and because of it, God will exalt him to a position of power and greatness. The poem closes with a re-statement of the truth that his suffering secured the salvation of others.

COMMENTS.

Meaning of Servant. A servant is one who is at the disposal of another, one who will do the work, carry out the intentions and represent the interests of another. A king's soldiers, subjects or

higher officials were called his servants. The servants of Jehovah are his worshippers, those whom he has chosen to do special tasks. In this latter sense Israel was the servant of Jehovah, but when the

word is used in the singular it often refers to some person of extraordinary character or usefulness. Jesus is in the New Testament called the servant of Jehovah.

His Weakness. There was nothing about the person of this servant, nor in his person, which was calculated to commend him as a popular hero. Mankind has chosen as its heroes those who excelled in strength, in personal attractiveness or in brilliancy of achievement. This servant had none of these by which to attract to himself popular favor. His visage was marred more than any man. He was without form and comeliness. He had no beauty so that men desired him. Instead of powers and victory—the surest road to popular favor—he suffered defeat, was oppressed and slain. Consequently he was despised and rejected of men. Notwithstanding this he was to startle many nations; and before him kings were to stand in mute wonder.

His Suffering. In line with this weakness which made his selection as God's chosen all the more remarkable, is the fact of his great suffering. Persons who bear the marks of physical pain and are broken by agony may appeal to our pity, but not our admiration. Pity is one of the more refined of virtues. Children shrink from objects of physical agony. Barbarians dispose of their weak and unfortunates, and such a practice is not unknown among civilized but non-Christian peoples. It takes centuries of training to teach charity and compassion for the pitiful, and that suffering may have a disciplinary value. The servant of Jehovah was a sufferer. His visage was marred. He was a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. Words are multiplied to express his agony and suffering. He was stricken, smitten, afflicted, wounded, bruised, oppressed, chastised. He died a loathsome death, and, as a common outcast, was buried with the wicked. No wonder, then, that

his contemporaries despised him as one from whom men hid their face and esteemed him not. Yet in spite of this God affirmed that his servant should prosper.

An Outcast. For the extraordinary sufferings of Jehovah's servant the men of the prophet's age had but one explanation. "We did esteem him stricken, smitten of God and afflicted." This was in line with the thought of the times. So Job's friends thought of him. To them it seemed apparent that Job had incurred the enmity of God, and this argued sin on his part. Even the disciples of Jesus asked concerning the blind man, "Who did sin, this man or his parents, that he should be born blind?" To them it seemed that there could be no other way to account for the pain and suffering of the servant of Jehovah. Nor have we, in this distant day, gotten very far from this idea. We do not affirm that suffering is a manifest token of divine disfavor, but we do hold that prosperity is a token of divine approval. In time they came to understand that his sufferings were to be accounted for in another way. "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed." They made the discovery that his extreme suffering was vicarious. It was not a mark of divine disapproval. He had done nothing to merit it. He was pure, but they were guilty. "Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all." That which had shocked and appalled them had been laid upon him for their advantage.

He Did Not Complain. The Old Testament fairly groans with the complaints of those who have been unjustly or untimely afflicted. Job raises his voice in protest against his sufferings, and feels that he could convince even God that he had been wronged, if God would only condescend to meet him. The king of

Isaiah's day, Hezekiah, complains bitterly that he is about to be taken off untimely. Jeremiah is known best for his tears. The Psalms cry to God on account of unfair treatment. The distress of all of those saints is mainly because, of two facts, namely, they suffer premature sickness and the miscarriage of justice. Both of these the Servant suffers. Sometimes he is a sick man, at others he is cruelly mistreated. By oppression and judgment, that is, by a tyrannous and unjust decree of law, he was taken away. There is no one of his contemporaries who sympathizes or understands. They look upon his pain with averted faces, and to his wrongs they are indifferent. He was a murdered man for the sake of the people to whom the stroke was due. Yet this injustice did not wring from him one word of protest. He bore it meekly and uncomplainingly. When he was afflicted he opened not his mouth. He looked upon this as a service to God, and it was borne by him as such a service should be borne, meekly and uncomplainingly.

An Expiation. Such an end, a convict's death and a felon's grave, would undoubtedly tempt men to say that God had willed it. It pleased God to bruise him, yet this was not because God had turned his back upon his own. By making him a guilt-offering he was enabled to see his seed, prolong his days and to make the pleasure of the land prosper in his hand. His death was expiatory.

It honored the law and paid the penalty for man's transgression. Through it atonement was made and the sinful were forgiven. In this was his greatness. At that point where, according to human standard, he seemed to sink the lowest, there was he truly the greatest; when he seemed to be in the valley of humiliation, there was he exalted. "Therefore," says the Lord, "will I divide him a portion with the great, and he shall divide the spoil with the strong."

Fulfilled by Jesus. "But about five hundred and fifty years after this prophecy was written, a man came forward among the sons of men—among this very nation from whom the prophecy had arisen—and in every essential of consciousness and of experience he was the counterpart, embodiment and fulfillment of this suffering servant and his service. Jesus Christ answers the question which the prophecy raises and leaves unanswered. In the prophecy we see one, who is only a spectre, a dream, a conscience without a voice, without a name, without a place in history. But in Jesus Christ of Nazareth the dream becomes a reality. He whom we have seen in this chapter only as the purpose of God—only through the eyes and consciences of a generation yet unborn—comes forward in flesh and blood; he speaks, he explains himself, he accomplishes almost to the last detail, the work, the patience and the death that are here described as ideal and representative." (George A. Smith.)

LESSON STORY.

The story of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah is the story of Jesus. No other could fill the measure either of service or of suffering indicated in the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah.

Even as a boy Jesus was obedient in all things. The very atmosphere of his home life in Nazareth was obedience to the Father. He grew in favor with God

and men. He was subject to his parents. The grace of submission rested upon him from his first volition until his death. Obedience prepared his cradle and obedience prepared his sepulcher.

At Jerusalem, at the tender age of twelve, he was absorbed in doing his Father's will, delighting to inquire in his Father's house. When Mary reproved

him for tarrying still in the temple, after she and Joseph had left for their northern home, he asked her earnestly: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" Strange that after all her knowledge of his ways she should not have understood his constant impulse to please his Father. Later in his years he said: "I do always the things that please my Father." Jesus in the temple presents a beautiful picture of the proper bent and occupation of childhood. "Let children be free and happy, for they shall find sorrow enough in after years," says one. Yes, Jesus was free. His was a free service. His delight was to do his Father's will. His childhood was the normal childhood, the happy childhood, the perfect childhood after which parents and teachers should seek. The only path of joy is the path of obedience to the law of life. It is easier for a bird to fly that obeys the laws of flying. It is easier for a fish to swim that follows the law of swimming. It is easier to be happy by following the necessary ways of happiness. How much sorrow Jesus suffered before his entrance upon his public ministry we may not know. But to have disobeyed the laws of life would have robbed him of his joy and would have destroyed his glorious hope.

Those who seek pleasure lose it. Those who seek obedience to God, or true pleasure through obedience, obtain pleasures for evermore. Jesus, for the joy set before him, endured the cross and despised shame. Moses was wise enough to prefer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season. For, it is said, "he looked unto the recompense of reward."

We are glad that life so deep, so pure, so obedient and now so gladdening and redemptive to others, was so silent for thirty years. There is much to be wrought in silence in human character. And yet we may know the foundation of such a life must have been laid in many a tragedy, must have been sunken deep

among many sorrows. But as the architect sees the building he has planned, carries its image in his heart through all the stages of its progress, so Jesus saw the joy of consummation even from the beginning. As soon as he awoke to consciousness in his being, knew himself and why he was here, he must have known, also, of the supernal joy to which he was going.

He traveled not the path of dalliance. He was born for a purpose. His trials were recognized stepping-stones, or rungs in the golden ladder to the loftiest throne on which at last he was to sit, but not alone.

The instrument out of tune must cry in discords until attuned. But if it knew it was on the way to harmony complete, it could endure for the joy to be. Jesus, for the joy set before him endured and triumphed.

It ought to be understood that washing one's robe in the blood of the Lamb of God is not pleasure-seeking or idle performance. To deny one's self and carry the cross, taking it willingly every day, is not to be absorbed in fleshly or worldly pleasure. Pleasure as an aim is a deadly foe to character, blessedness and high service.

There is such a thing, however, as taking pleasure in infirmities, necessities, hardships, and gaining the control of self. This pleasure was known to Jesus, and even to Paul, his servant, as the apostle himself declares.

But whatever depths of sorrow were hidden in the cup which Jesus drank, or whatever pleasures floated on its surface, we may know that this life was too deep, too great, too rich, too prophetic of greatness yet to be, to seek the pleasures of the world, the flesh or those of transient stay.

"He humbled himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross," in order to fulfill his mission of love. He felt the exhilaration of delight when about his Father's business, doing

the Father's will, not in seeking pleasure. True pleasure flies from them who seek the false. It comes not to those who spend their days in seeking it. It comes indeed to them who seek it not; but who seek, instead, duty and the will of God. Because Christ so humbled himself to suffering and to death, so wisely chose the narrow way of duty and the will of God, "God hath highly exalted him and given him

the name which is above every name."

How long will Jesus' pleasures last? In his presence there is fullness of joy, and at his right hand are pleasures for evermore. It is wisdom to follow him. It is success to walk in his way. It is infinite promotion to walk as he walked. To suffer with him, in his service and patience as the Suffering Servant of Jehovah, is to be glorified and to reign with him.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What may be said of Hezekiah's piety—its depth and reality?
2. What may be said of his wisdom as shown in his piety?
3. What lesson may we learn from the destruction of the Assyrian host?
4. What important relation did Isaiah sustain to Hezekiah?

5. Upon what special ground did Hezekiah ask God to defeat Assyria?
6. What particular favor did God show Hezekiah in his sickness? Isa. 38:1-5.
7. What sign was given that God would deliver Jerusalem? Isa. 38:6-8.
8. What foolish things was done by Hezekiah—disapproved of by Isaiah? Isa. 39:1-8.

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSONS WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. What did Isaiah prophesy as to the wisdom and exaltation of the Suffering Servant of Jehovah? Isa. 52:13.
2. What was declared as to his visage and form? Isa. 52:14.
3. What is meant by the words, "He shall sprinkle many nations"? Isa. 52:15. (See the margin—"startle.")
4. Why in his presence would mighty kings be silent? Isa. 52:15.
5. What was meant by "message" and what by "the arm of the Lord"? Isa. 53:1.
6. What estimate of Christ was formed by Jewish rulers? Isa. 53:2.
7. What six things are said of him in Isaiah 53:3?
8. What great kindness hath he shown? Isa. 53:4.

9. What four mercies on his part are named in Isaiah 53:5?
10. What sad deviation on the part of God's people did Jesus seek to correct, and by what means? Isa. 53:6. Does the principle apply to us?
11. What remarkable patience and obedient submission did he show? Isa. 53:7.
12. What great reason is assigned for the sufferings of Christ? Isa. 53:8.
13. What blindness and ingratitude were shown toward him at his death? Isa. 53:9.
14. How was the will of God subverted in Jesus' death? Isa. 53:10; Jno. 10:15, 18.
15. What were to be his travail and his satisfaction? Isa. 53:11.
16. Why did the prophet say the Suffering Servant should be great? Isa. 53:12.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. The Messianic character of this prophecy, in the light of the New Testament, is very clear and unmistakable. Jesus is indeed the spirit of prophecy.

2. The prophets searched diligently—searching what time or manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them, did signify when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glory that should follow. 1 Pet. 1:10, 11. The Spirit of Christ inspired them to look forward to the great consummation of mercy in God's Suffering Servant and the glory that should follow his coming, his sufferings and death.

3. Philip, in preaching to the Ethiopian (Acts 8:35) from this fifty-third chapter of Isaiah—preached Jesus. The eunuch, hearing and believing the gospel, was baptized and went on his way rejoicing. Jesus is the Spirit of Isaiah.

4. One of the most potent and usual arguments of the apostles to prove that Jesus was the promised Son of God was the fact that he clearly fulfilled prophecy throughout the Old Testament.

5. Jesus himself repeatedly reminded his disciples that in his life and especially in his death and resurrection, the Scriptures must be fulfilled. That a type or mold of prophetic teaching, clear and multiform, striking in its features of de-

sign, should have been promulgated from 400 to 2,000 years before it was fulfilled—fulfilled in marvelous and incontestable fact, has always been a mighty argument for the unity of the Scriptures and also for the divine character and mission of Jesus our Lord.

6. A great lesson is taught by the humility, suffering, patience and heroic fidelity, as well as by the wonderful message, of Christ who died to bring us back to God, from whom like sheep we all had gone astray. He died for us.

7. The Church must endure hardness as a good soldier of Jesus Christ; must present to the world a faithful picture of the suffering Christ within its membership, suffering for the redemption of the world, and yet at the same time triumphing over suffering through hope in his grace and glory.

8. Corresponding with the twelfth verse of the fifty-third chapter of Isaiah is that beautiful and thrilling passage of Philippians 2:5-11. Jesus emptied himself of his glory and filled his life with shame and humiliation. He became obedient unto the death of the cross. Therefore he is exalted and given the name above every name, at which the world shall bow the knee and confess him Lord to the glory of God the Father.

MANASSEH'S WICKEDNESS AND PENITENCE.

2 Chron. 33:1-20. (Print vs. 1-13.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Cease to do evil; learn to do well. Isa. 1:16, 17.

Memory Verses—12, 13. Time—695 B. C. Persons—Manasseh, people of Judah and the host of Assyria. Places—Gihon and Ophel.

DAILY READINGS.

July 10.... M—2 Chron. 33:1-20—Manasseh's Wickedness and Repentance.
 July 11.... T—Ps. 119:65-80—"In Faithfulness Thou Hast Afflicted Me."
 July 12.... W—Heb. 12:1-13—What Father Chasteneth not his Son?
 July 13.... T—Psa. 99:1-23—"Blessed is the Man Whom Thou Chastenest."
 July 14.... F—Prov. 3:1-12—Whom the Lord Loveth He Reproveth.
 July 15.... S—Job 5:17-27—He Woundeth and Maketh Whole.
 July 16.... S—Rev. 3:14-22—As many as I Love I Reprove.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

The name Gihon is to be found frequently in the Old Testament. Here Solomon was crowned (1 Kings 1:33). It was a spring, as 2 Chron. 32:30 shows. Robinson and other early explorers placed it at the head of the valley on the western side of Jerusalem (the valley of the Sons of Hinnom), others have sought Gihon on the north; and some recent students of the topography of Jerusalem identify it with the intermittent spring on the eastern side of the city, now known as the Virgin's spring. The biblical data seems to support the last view as to its location. Our lesson tells us that Manasseh

built a wall about the city of David, but *west* of Gihon. The pool which Robinson identified as Gihon never had a wall of the city west of it, since it is considerably more than a quarter of a mile west of the present wall.

Concerning Ophel there is perfect agreement. It was the portion of the eastern hill which lies south of the temple area and was one of the districts of Jerusalem. What Manasseh did, therefore, was to build a wall on the slope of the Kedron valley west of Gihon, which enclosed this part of the city. This wall extended to the fish gate (Neh. 3:3).

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

Hezekiah, who was mentioned in the lesson for July 2, reigned twenty-nine years. At his death his son, Manasseh, succeeded him and reigned for a longer period than any other king of Judah or Israel. He ruled for fifty-five years. He is universally recognized as the worst king in the line of David. The sacred historian discusses his reign almost exclusively from the religious point of view.

He does not refer to Assyria except to say that Manasseh was for a time a prisoner in Babylon, which we know from independent sources was a capital of Assyria for part of this period. The Assyrian records, however, make it clear that Manasseh was a vassal of that power. His name is mentioned twice. Once he is said to have paid homage to Esarhaddon and to have acknowledged him as the king

1 Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign; and he reigned fifty and five years in Jerusalem. 2 And he did that which was evil in the sight of Jehovah, after the abominations of the nations whom Jehovah cast out before

the children of Israel. 3 For he built again the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; and he reared up altars for the Baalim, and made Asheroth, and worshipped all the host of heaven, and served them. 4 And he built

of the city of Judah. Again it is told of him that he furnished "men and ships, in addition to the customary tribute," for Ashurbanipal's first campaign against Egypt. This shows that the land was probably under the influence, as well as the control, of Assyria. The recent excavation of Gezer brought to light two deeds to land made within the period of Manasseh's reign. The land was conveyed by a notary with an unmistakably Assyrian name. This helps to make it clear how it was that the kingdom which under Hezekiah was devoted to the worship of Jehovah becomes under his son more deeply steeped in idolatry than it ever was before or afterwards. It shows us that Manasseh was a man who yield-

ed himself entirely to the influences about him, and he became thoroughly devoted to idolatry. He revived the old Canaanitish worship which Hezekiah had destroyed. But Baal and Ashteroth no longer satisfied; Judah now worshiped all the host of heaven and served them (v. 3), a worship to which the Assyrians and Babylonians were devoted. Manasseh also stained Jerusalem with the foul worship of Moloch, god of the Ammonites, and Chemosh, god of the Moabites, and offered to them human sacrifice. The temple itself was converted into an idol's temple. The author of Kings tells that he shed much innocent blood in Jerusalem (1 Kings 21:16), in an effort probably to compel all to conform to the illegal worship that he had established. It may be inferred from this that the servants of Jehovah did not yield without a struggle.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 1. Manasseh was twelve years old: Since Hezekiah's life was prolonged fifteen years Manasseh was born three years after his sickness. Bishop Hall says that had he been able to foresee the kind of son, barrenness would have been a blessing. **Fifty-five years:** Hezekiah lived only fifty-four years. Manasseh's reign was longer than that of any other king of Judah or Israel. Jeroboam II of Israel, and Asa of Judah, each reigned forty-one years.

2. The heathen whom Jehovah cast out: The Canaanites, whose idolatrous practices Manasseh followed. They are

sometimes called the Amorites, as in 2 Kings 21:11. In that passage it is stated that Manasseh's sin was greater than theirs because he sinned in spite of knowledge.

3. He built again the high places, etc.: These were the places where the people, in violation of the law that there should be an altar in Jerusalem only, had worshiped Jehovah. Such worship, though offered ostensibly to Jehovah, was often mingled with idolatrous practices. For the account of Hezekiah's destruction of them see 2 Chron. 30:14; 31:1. **He reared up altars for the Baalim:** This was a return to the worship which had flour-

altars in the house of Jehovah, whereof Jehovah said, In Jerusalem shall my name be for ever. 5 And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of Jehovah. 6 He also made his children to pass through the fire in the valley of the son of Hinnom; and he practised augury, and used enchantments, and practised sorcery, and dealt with them that had familiar spir-

its, and with wizards: he wrought much evil in the sight of Jehovah, to provoke him to anger. 7 And he set the graven image of the idol, which he had made, in the house of God, of which God said to David and to Solomon his son, In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, will I put my name for ever: 8 neither will I any more remove the foot of Israel

ished in the days of Ahab. The plural, Baalim, is used because each city and locality would have a Baal of its own. In some way these local deities would get a reputation for some particular power, as the Baal of Ekron was known as Baal-Zebub, the Baal of flies. Manasseh established worship to many of these Baalim. And made Asheroth: This word, like Baalim, is plural. Worshipped all the host of heaven: The worship of the sun, moon and stars. This was Assyrian and Babylonian worship.

4. Altars in the house of Jehovah: Manasseh was not satisfied with the establishment of the above-mentioned foreign cults, but he adopts a policy which was calculated to curtail the worship rendered to Jehovah.

5. Altars for the host of heaven: It seems that the temple was used for the star worship especially. The two courts: Sometimes called the inner and the outer courts, and at other times the higher and the lower courts. The great altar of Jehovah stood in the inner court only.

6. Made his children pass through the fire: He engaged in the Moloch worship, and offered his children as human sacrifice. In the valley of the son of Hinnom: This was the ravine to the west and south of Jerusalem. As a result of this worship being conducted there, this valley became defiled and was used as a place for burning offal. Hence its name, translated into *Gehenna*, became a designa-

tion for the place of eternal torment. He practiced augury: The gathering of omens from sounds, flights of birds and other sources, as to whether a certain day was favorable for an enterprise. The modern fortune-telling is a survival of this superstition. Used enchantment: Consulted signs which were supposed to indicate whether a certain act should or should not be done. Modern Christians have not entirely departed from the ways of Manasseh. Practiced sorcery: Tried to guard himself against the influence of evil spirits, as the superstitious still do by means of horseshoes, etc. Dealt with them that had familiar spirits: Persons who professed to impart superhuman knowledge, as modern spiritualists claim to do. Wizards: Another class of persons who claimed to be supernaturally wise. He wrought much evil: All of these practices, which survive in so many modern forms, were in the days of Manasseh regarded as evil in the sight of Jehovah, and provoked him to anger.

7. The graven image of the idol: This was Manasseh's most flagrant violation. He prepared an image, which was probably especially grand, and set this up in the temple. In 2 Kings 21:7 this is said to have been an image of Aserah. The temple of Jehovah was thus converted into a temple of Aserah.

8. If only they will observe, etc.: God's promises were conditional. By these sins Juah failed to keep its part of the

from off the land which I have appointed for your fathers, if only they will observe to do all that I have commanded them, even all the law and the statutes and the ordinances *given* by Moses. 9 And Manasseh seduced Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, so that they did evil more than did the nations whom Jehovah destroyed before the children of Israel.

10 And Jehovah spake to Manasseh, and to his people; but they gave no heed.

11 Wherefore Jehovah brought upon them the captains of the host of the king of Assyria, who took Manasseh in chains and bound him with fetters, and carried him to Babylon. 12 And when he was in distress, he besought Jehovah his God, and humbled himself greatly before the God of his fathers. 13 And he prayed unto him; and he was entreated of him, and heard his supplication, and brought him again to Jerusalem into his kingdom. Then Manasseh knew that Jehovah he was God.

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agreement, and God was really released from his part.

9. **Manasseh seduced Judah, etc.:** This sin was not committed by the king only, but the people participated in it. **They did evil more than the nations:** In the greater variety of their worships and in the intensity with which they worshiped. They sinned, too, against light and knowledge.

10. To their idolatry they added the sin of disregard to God's commands.

11. **Wherefore:** Because he did not heed God's warning and repent. **The king of Assyria:** There were two kings of

Assyria during the time of Manasseh, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. It is not known which one took him captive. It seems that neither came to Jerusalem in person. **To Babylon:** This city was under the control of Assyria, and according to their records was used as a capital for a time.

12. Nothing but the most direful calamity could humble Manasseh.

13. **He prayed unto him:** The Apocrypha contains a small book called *The prayer of Manasseh*. It is not the genuine prayer of the king. **That Jehovah he was God:** And consequently, that the idols were no gods.

COMMENTS.

The Environment of Manasseh's Youth. It was unfortunate that Hezekiah had no grown son to follow him. Manasseh was only twelve at Hezekiah's death, and this is a child's most impressible age. Of his mother we know nothing more than her name. Doubtless she had considerable influence during the early years of his reign, but whether of her choice, or contrary to it, he fell under the baneful influence of the idolatrous party that must have been strong, though suppressed during Hezekiah's reign. They were able to turn the thought of the child king to

the ideals and the policy that had dominated the kingdom during the reign of his grandfather, Ahaz. But when once his mind was directed into idolatrous paths, he went to unheard-of lengths. There seems scarcely to have been a religion of his time that did not win recognition from Manasseh.

The Religions of Manasseh. Three religions are mentioned as receiving recognition from Manasseh. The first was the old Canaanitish worship of Baal and Asheroth. The nature of this worship was discussed in the lesson for January 22.

The second was the astral worship and was essentially Babylonian. With it was connected the augury and the enchantment, for the practice of which he is condemned (v. 6). The following quotation from Dollinger shows how they were connected: "Man soon now came to this, to ask the stars for counsel, to read in their motions the destinies of individuals and whole peoples, and to offer prayer and sacrifice to them as powers of fate and living beings. There arose at the same time a desire to bring these powers, or at least the emanations of their power, nearer to them, to draw them down to themselves, and to detain them in immediate proximity. They carried about with them, as a means of protection, the power of the stars that had streamed from them, or had been dextrously enticed from them, and centered in amulets, or teraphim. All the craft of astrology and magic had an extensive theatre opened out for it. To the planets in particular, which they had early learned to distinguish from the fixed stars, with emblems assigned to them, the Chaldeans ascribed virtues which proceeded from them to dominate the entire circle of earthly creation, and exercise a determining influence upon the life of the earth and the beings pertaining to it. They styled the planets 'interpreters,' because, by their color, and their rising and setting, they declared the will of fate to those who were initiated in their mysteries. Each province of life under the moon was conceived as subordinated to one of the starry powers. In metals, stones, plants, beasts, and men, the virtue of the stars was revealed, and with that virtue their whole nature was penetrated; on this, then, hung their belief in astrological amulets, in which the power of some star was fancied to be centered and included, and which were worn as a defense against danger. Hence the destinies of countries and people, kings and private persons, could be read in the revolutions of the planets. In particular, the

five planets, or their genii, were worshiped as gods—Jupiter and Venus as beneficent, Mars and Saturn as inimical; all, of course, under different names. Thirty other stars, subordinate to the planets, were called 'the counselling gods,' and to them were added twelve more, 'masters of the gods,' to each of whom were assigned a month of the year, and one of the signs of the zodiac."

The Worship of Moloch. The third religion favored by Manasseh required human sacrifice. This is generally connected with the god Moloch, who was a form of Baal. "Besides the incense consumed in his honor, bulls also were sacrificed to Baal, and probably horses, too; the Persians at least sacrificed the latter to their sun-gods. But the principal sacrifice was children. This horrible custom was grounded in part on the notion that children were the dearest possession of their parents, and, in part, that, as pure and innocent beings, they were the offerings of atonement most certain to pacify the anger of the deity; and further, that the god of whose essence the generative power of nature was, had a just title to that which was sexually begotten of man, and to the surrender of their children's lives. The sacrifices were consumed by fire; the life given by the fire-god he should also take back again by the flames which destroy being. The rabbinical description of the image of Moloch, that it was a human figure with a bull's head and outstretched arms, is confirmed by the account Diodorus gives of the Carthaginian Cronos, or Moloch. The image of metal was made glowing hot by a fire kindled within it, and the children, laid in its arms, rolled from thence into the fiery lap below. Voluntary offering on the part of the parents was essential to the success of the sacrifice; even the first-born, nay, the only child of the family, was given up. The parents stopped the cries of their children by fondling and kissing them, for the victim ought not to weep, and the sound of complaint was

drowned in the din of flutes and kettle-drums. Mothers, said Plutarch, stood by without tears or sobs; if they wept or sobbed they lost the honor of the act, and their children were sacrificed notwithstanding. Such sacrifices took place either annually or on the occasion of public calamities, to appease the wrath of the god." (Dollinger.)

The Worst of all Kings of Judah. "Manasseh's reign forms an epoch in that development, for under him the apostasy reached its height. If David was the model king, then Manasseh was his inverted image. It is true that many of his ancestors had tolerated idolatry and practiced it themselves. His grandfather, Ahaz, had even removed the ancient altar of burnt offering and set up in its place another one which he had himself caused to be made on a heathen pattern, and had also sacrificed his son to Moloch (2 Kings 16); but Manasseh went so far as even to establish a special place of sacrifice for this god in the valley of Hinnom (2 Kings 23: 10; Jer. 6:31; 19:6). Moreover, he set up an idol in the temple itself, and that, too, an image of the goddess whose worship was connected with licentious rites and practices. In fact, he made Jerusalem, the city which Jehovah had chosen for his own abode, the place for collecting and practicing all forms of idolatry. He was a violent enemy of the Jehovah-worship, which he sought to abolish. He formally introduced all sorts of idolatrous abominations, and he compelled his people to practice them. This had never been done even in the kingdom of the ten tribes, 'but now there arose in Judah, the only remaining support of the true religion, the most open and violent hostility to its most sacred principles, on the part of the king himself. . . . The heart of the ancient religion had never before been so sharply and violently smitten.'"

The Reaction Against Isaiah. Before twenty years had passed from the day on which Jerusalem, with the forty-sixth Psalm on her lips, sought with all her heart the God of Isaiah, she relapsed into an idolatry, that wore only the sign of the uncompromising puritanism it had displaced: that it was gloomy and filled with a sense of sin unknown to Israel's idolatries previous to the age of Isaiah. The change would be almost incomprehensible to us, who have realized the spiritual effects of Sennacherib's disappearance, if we had not within our own history a somewhat analogous experience. Puritanism was as gloriously accredited by events, and seemed to be as generally accepted by England under Cromwell, as faith in the spiritual religion of Isaiah was vindicated by the deliverance of Jerusalem and the peace of Judah under Hezekiah. But swiftly as the ruling temper in England changed after Cromwell's death, and Puritanism was laid under the ban, and persecution and licentiousness broke out, so quickly, when Hezekiah died, did Manasseh, his son—no change of dynasty here—do evil in the sight of Jehovah, and make Judah to sin, building again the high places and rearing up altars for Baal and altars in the house of Jehovah, whereof Jehovah had said, in Jerusalem will I put my name. Idolatry was never so rampant in Judah. Moreover, Manasseh shed innocent blood till he filled Jerusalem from one end to the other. It is in this carnage that tradition has placed the death of Isaiah. He who had been Judah's best counsellor through five reigns, on whom the whole nation had depended in the day of her distress, and by whose faith her long-hoped-for salvation had at last become substantive, was violently put to death by the son of Hezekiah. It is said that he was *sawn asunder*." (Geo. A. Smith.)

THE LESSON STORY.

The reign of Manasseh was longer and more wicked than that of any other of the kings of Judah. Chroniclers and prophets have been singularly brief in their accounts of him, which may have been due to his atrocious wickedness. Enough has been said, however, to teach us from his life the great lessons of righteous retribution and divine compassion.

Manasseh was but a lad of twelve at the death of Hezekiah. Being deprived, at this impressionable age, of so good a father, would seem in some degree an extenuation of his subsequent base conduct. Surely the influences thrown around him must have been evil, for at the very beginning of his active service he set himself vigorously to undo all the good which had been wrought by his father. He restored the high places and groves which Hezekiah had removed, built altars for Baal and made an Asherah, as wicked Ahab had done in Israel. In the courts of the temple he erected altars for the worship of the heavenly bodies, and removed from this sacred shrine Jehovah's altar and the Ark. Sinking still deeper into idolatry, he revived the worship of Moloch, with its human sacrifices, caused his own sons to pass through the fire, and reared a temple to the cruel god in the valley of Hinnom. To all these idolatrous practices still another was added. He dealt with wizards and necromancers, practiced augury and used enchantments. Thus Manasseh was grossly wicked himself, and "seduced the people to do more wickedness than the nations whom Jehovah destroyed before them." In these desperately evil days the priests seem to have been sadly careless and indifferent, but the prophets, like true sentinels, ceased not to sound their notes of solemn warning. They declared that on account of Manasseh's crimes God should bring calamity upon Jerusalem, such as should cause the ears of him that

heard it to tingle. Their bold and incessant denunciations of sin resulted in the fiercest persecutions ever recorded in the history of Israel. "Manasseh filled Jerusalem with innocent blood," says the sacred writer, and according to Josephus, during this reign of terror, there was the "daily slaying of the prophets." Jeremiah describes it, saying, "Your own sword hath devoured your prophets, like a destroying lion."

At this dark period the name "Manasseh," which means "forgetfulness," seems to have had a deep significance. In the case of naming Joseph's son "Manasseh," it meant that all the cruelties he had received from his brethren in his "father's house" were then forgotten, but in the case of Judah's wicked king, it seemed to signify that he had forgotten God, and all that was good in his "father's house." . . . Manasseh's course had grown so desperate that nothing but the sorest humiliation could save him, so in the good providence of God he was carried away in chains and fetters by the king of Assyria, the son of Sennacherib, to Babylon. It seems a miracle of grace that one so hardened in sin should have lifted up his voice in penitence and prayer. Yet he did, and was heard, for "the Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon him." He who had heard the prayer of Hezekiah, his righteous servant, in the temple and sent deliverance to Jerusalem, now heard the cry of his repentant son in far-off Babylon, and restored him to his kingdom. Manasseh returned from his exile with a new and all-controlling motive. Out of his sins and humiliation had come the deep conviction that "Jehovah was God." From henceforth all his energies were turned to good account. Jerusalem's outer wall was built, brave captains were placed in the fortified cities of Judah; every idol was cast down, and every altar destroyed. Jehovah's altar was established in the temple, where again were offered thank-

offerings and peace-offerings by the people. The king who had led Judah into deepest idolatry now strove with all his might to lead the nation back with singleness of devotion to Jehovah. The story

of Manasseh presents on the one side a dark and terrible picture of sin and its punishment, and on the other, the bright one of forgiveness and blessing, through true repentance.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. To whom did Isaiah refer as the "Suffering Servant"?

2. How did the Jewish rulers in Jerusalem regard him?

3. Although despised, what was his attitude and relation to the people?

4. Instead of being regarded justly in his humiliation (53:5, 6), how was he esteemed (53:4)?

5. For whom did he suffer and why was suffering necessary?

6. What preacher in the beginning of the Church began his sermon concerning Jesus with this chapter of Isaiah?

7. Was his death an involuntary martyrdom or according to God's purpose?

8. Because of such suffering and service what should be the reward? v. 12.

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. How old was Manasseh when crowned, and how long did he reign? 2 Chron. 33:1.

2. What was the moral character of his reign, and after what examples? 2 Chron. 33:2.

3. What did he restore that his father had destroyed? 2 Chron. 33:3.

4. To what despised god did he rear altars and what else did he worship? 2 Chron. 33:3.

5. What especially profane and disobedient act did he perform? 2 Chron. 33:4.

6. What did he build in the two courts of the temple? 2 Chron. 33:5.

7. What six evils are mentioned against him in 2 Chron. 33:6?

8. What wickedness of the king seemed to the Chronicler extremely wicked? 2 Chron. 33:7, 8.

9. Under king Manasseh, how did Judah compare in wickedness with the nations which God had destroyed before Israel? 2 Chron. 33:9.

10. Were the sins of Manasseh and Israel sins of ignorance? 2 Chron. 33:10. Compare the case of Belshazzar, Dan. 5:22. Refer Jno. 3:19.

11. Therefore what punishment did God bring upon Manasseh? 2 Chron. 33:11.

12. What was the wholesome effect of his distress? 2 Chron. 33:12.

13. What would indicate that his repentance was genuine? 2 Chron. 33:13.

14. What, after this experience, did he build in Jerusalem? 2 Chron. 33:14.

15. What destructive work did he perform indicative of repentance? 2 Chron. 33:15.

16. What constructive service did he render indicative of the same? 2 Chron. 33:16.

17. What persons are said to have spoken to the king in the name of the Lord? 2 Chron. 33:18.

18. What king succeeded him upon the throne and what his character? 2 Chron. 33:22.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. There is a wide difference between error and sin; between sins of ignorance and sins of presumption. One reason

why we are forbidden to judge one another is probably because we can not tell one another's motives. Man looketh upon

the outward appearance; but God looketh upon the heart. Often it might seem to us that one is utterly inexcusable. It might seem that his light was all-sufficient, and yet God may know of some defect in his understanding, some frailty in his constitution, which, if known to us, would entirely change our estimate of his actions. We ought to be grateful that He who is so wise, so just, so merciful, shall be our judge. It looks—from the the early conduct of Manasseh as king of Judah—as though there could not be any genuine repentance in such a presumptuous sinner. He had the splendid example of his father, Hezekiah, a godly, noble king. He had enjoyed the opportunity of studying the relation of wickedness to prosperity in the reigns of former kings. It would seem, too, that at the beginning of his reign a strong public sentiment had been developed in favor of righteousness. And yet the readiness with which the nation followed him back into idolatry would indicate that the people were not wholly satisfied with Je-

hovah as their only God. They seem to have had an envious eye upon the nations around them that appeared to prosper more than Judah; seem to have been restless and ambitious for exaltation like the great world powers that worshiped idols. It is hard to judge Manasseh without severe condemnation, unless we remember that the Lord showed him mercy.

2. The great lesson for us to impress upon ourselves and others is the pivotal and extreme value of *repentance*. God is a forgiving God. He delights to remember mercy. Though "chains" and "fetters" be necessary to lead to repentance, the result is well worth the discipline. Babylon was not God's ultimate destination for his disobedient people. It lay in the pathway of necessary discipline for his stubborn and rebellious children. It cured them of idolatry. It brought their hearts back from their habitual backsliding. Let teachers and parents seek every just means to lead sinners to repentance. God is waiting to bless the repentant. Read Rev. 3:19, 20. All are sinners.

JOSIAH'S DEVOTION TO GOD.

2 Chron. 34:1-13.

GOLDEN TEXT—Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth. Eccl. 12:1.

Memory Verses—1, 2. Suggested Reading—2 Kings 22. Time—638 B. C.

Persons—Josiah, Hezekiah, officers, priests, Levites, overseers and people. Place—Jerusalem.

DAILY READINGS.

- July 17.... M—2 Chron. 34:1-13—Josiah's Devotion to God.
 July 18.... T—2 Chron. 14:1-15—The Devotion of Asa.
 July 19.... W—2 Chron. 17:1-13—The Devotion of Jehoshaphat.
 July 20.... T—2 Chron. 29:1-11—The Devotion of Hezekiah.
 July 21.... F—Dan. 1:1-21—The Devotion of Daniel and his Friends.
 July 22.... S—Dan. 3:1-30—The Devotion of Three Israelites.
 July 23.... S—Neh. 1:1—2:20—The Devotion of Nehemiah.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

The condition of both kingdoms had changed considerably by this time. In fact, the northern kingdom disappeared about eighty years before, and the territory in which the ten tribes formerly lived seems to have remained under the control of Assyria and to have been governed by rulers appointed by its authority. There were, however, many members of the ten tribes who still occupied their land. These were of the poorer sort and those who succeeded in hiding from the Assyrian army. Many undoubtedly took up their residence within the territory of Judah, and all must have been impressed by the fact that Jerusalem remained, while Samaria fell. Hence the preaching of the prophets would have some effect upon them, and they would

look with more favor upon the advances made by Josiah and upon his invitations to engage with Judah in the worship of Jehovah than they did those of Hezekiah. There was then for the remnant that remained a partial restoration of the religious union which had been broken in the days of Jeroboam and Rehoboam.

But Judah, too, had suffered at the hand of the Assyrians. Sennacherib did not capture Jerusalem, but he did overrun the rural districts, and the smaller towns were at his mercy. During the long reign of Manasseh Assyria had maintained its authority in his capital and he ruled by virtue of its consent. It must then have been greatly impoverished and weakened by being constantly despoiled by troops and by the annual payment of tribute.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

Another power is rising into prominence that toward the close of Josiah's reign will change the political aspect of western Asia. This is Egypt, which just at this stage of its history was granted an increase of strength, but it was quickly eclipsed by the greater power of Nebu-

chadnezzar in Babylon. He did not arise, however, till after the death of Josiah. Politically Josiah interpreted his duty and his safety to lie in devotion to Assyria, and in the effort to check the progress of its enemy, Egypt, he lost his life. This lesson, however, deals with the early

1 Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign; and he reigned thirty and one years in Jerusalem. 2 And he

did that which was right in the eyes of Jehovah, and walked in the ways of David his father, and turned not aside to

years of Josiah, and especially his religious attitude.

"The long reign of Manasseh, extending over more than half a century, had greatly demoralized the kingdom. A gross and sensual idolatry had sapped ancient morals and corrupted the whole fabric of society." The heathen faction which controlled events all during his reign, controlled them also during the reign of his son and successor, Amon. He was twenty-two when he came to the throne and continued without change the policy and worship of his father. He seems to have been popular with the people, but a faction had him murdered. The motive for this is not clear. There is no evidence that it was done by those who desired a purer worship of Jehovah. The probability is that it was due to political differences, and it may be that thus early Egypt was intriguing in the affairs of Palestine, and thus sought to get rid of one who was not favorable to their plans. In any case, his murder was avenged by the people of the land, which shows that the rule

and policy of Manasseh were acceptable to the common people. It seems singular that the population which was depended upon to overthrow Athaliah and restore under Joash the purer worship of Jehovah was now inclined otherwise. Our information is entirely too meager to be able to understand the changes in the religious and political attitude of the fickle Judean population. Amon had reigned less than two years at the time of his death, and his young son, Josiah, who was at that time only eight years of age, succeeded him. Under his reign of twenty years Judah enjoyed its last brief glimpse of prosperity before it finally sank into ruin. His mother was Jedidah, whose name means *beloved of God*. Her father was Adaiah, and his name means *honored of God*. He came, therefore, on his mother's side from a devout family and one that worshiped Jehovah. This probably accounts for his religious bias, and in some way unknown to us he developed sufficient strength to control the cliques which were undoubtedly active both before and after his reign.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 1. Eight years old: Josiah must have had some personal guardian and a regent to exercise the functions of government on his behalf. His tender age explains why he did not begin his reforms earlier. **He reigned thirty-one years:** His death came when he was comparatively a youthful man, being at that time only thirty-nine. He was slain in battle with Pharaoh-Neco, king of Egypt (2 Chron. 35:20-24). 2 Kings 22:1 adds the information that Josiah's mother's name was Jedidah, the daughter of

Adaiah of Bozkath, a place in the lowlands of Judah. More details are given concerning her than are usual in the case of a mother of the king. This would suggest that she had considerable prominence in the early years of Josiah.

2. Turned not aside: This is stronger praise than is given to any other king of Judah. Other kings did well and were diligent in the service of Jehovah, but it is the peculiarity of Josiah that he never swerved from the straight path of duty.

3. Eighth year of his reign: This

the right hand or to the left. 3 For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet young, he began to seek after the God of David his father; and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the Asherim, and the graven images, and the molten images. 4 And they brake down the altars of the Baalim in his presence; and the sun-images that were on high above them he hewed down; and the Asherim, and the graven images, and the molten images, he brake in pieces, and made dust of them, and strewed it upon the graves of them that had sacrificed unto them. 5 And he burnt the bones of the priests upon their altars, and purged Judah and Jerusalem. 6 And

so did he in the cities of Manasseh and Ephraim and Simeon, even unto Naphtali, in their ruins round about. 7 And he brake down the altars, and beat the Asherim and the graven images into powder, and hewed down all the sun-images throughout all the land of Israel, and returned to Jerusalem.

8 Now in the eighteenth year of his reign, when he had purged the land and the house, he sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah, and Maaseiah the governor of the city, and Joah the son of Joahaz the recorder, to repair the house of Jehovah his God. 9 And they came to Hilkiah the high priest, and delivered the money that was brought into the house of God, which the Levites, the keepers of the

verse notes two stages in Josiah's reform, and verse 8 a third one. (See Comments.)

4. In his presence: Josiah personally superintended the destruction of the idolatrous objects. The sun images: This is the only place that such images are mentioned in the Bible, though in 2 Kings 23:11 there is mention of horses which had been dedicated to the worship of the sun. It seems that there was an elaborate worship of the sun, in which its daily course was represented by a chariot and horses. This image was probably a representation of the sun's disc. And made dust of them: As Moses did the image of the calf made by Aaron and the Israelites (Ex. 32:20). Strewed it upon the graves, etc.: This would serve the double purpose of disposing of this polluted dust so that it would not unexpectedly produce ceremonial defilement and of desecrating the graves of idolaters, thus making their example to be avoided.

5. He burnt the bones: This is described in detail in 2 Kings 23:15-20. It was to render the altars polluted.

6. In the cities of Manasseh, etc.: Po-

litically Josiah was a faithful vassal of Assyria, but not in his religion. The Assyrian power must at this time have been occupied with other matters to leave such an invasion of its territory unrebuked. In their ruins round about: See the margin: The meaning of the clause in the Hebrew can not be determined.

7. He did the same in the territory of Israel which he had done in Judah.

8. When he had purged the land, etc.: In the way described above. He sent Shaphan, etc.: Shaphan belonged to an important family. His sons, Ahikam and Gemariah, and his grandson, Gedaliah, were prominent in the history of Judah during the next generation. As scribe he seems to have had an oversight of important business. To repair the house of Jehovah: This was the event which led up to Josiah's reform, and hence is regarded as of the utmost importance.

9. Hilkiah: His name is not previously mentioned, but his ancestors and descendants are given in 1 Chron. 6:13 and Ezra 7:1. The money that was brought, etc.: In 2 Kings 21:4 there is mention of the fact that the doorkeepers had col-

younger contemporary of Josiah. During this period the prophets Nahum and Zephaniah did their work. They were too young probably to influence the religious zeal of Josiah, but they are mentioned to show that he was not alone in his devotion to Jehovah. The tide of heathendom is rolling back, and while it does not entirely recede, there are strong men in both the government and among the preachers who do not hesitate to oppose it. Josiah, like every man who does a great work, was a man of his age, dominated by its strong influences.

Three Stages in His Progress. The historian notes stages in his religious development, and these show that, while due recognition must be given to his mother and others who influence him for good, the credit is after all largely due to him. At the age of sixteen years, that being the eighth year of his reign, he began to show a decision in favor of Jehovah. He personally accepted Jehovah as his God. Four years later, when he was then twenty years old and had been on the throne twelve years, he commenced the purification of the land of idolatrous shrines and objects. In all of these religious reformatations the first stage was to tear down and destroy. It was six years later, or in the eighteenth year of his reign, that he began to do the real constructive work of restoring the worship of Jehovah. In all of this we see progressive development and personal decision.

Restoration of the Temple. This is the last of the periodic repairs through which the temple has passed. There had been some less extensive repairs earlier, but the first overhauling of the temple was in the days of Joash. The idolatry of Athaliah and her predecessors had made this necessary. The next repairs were in the days of Hezekiah and were made necessary by the neglect and the innovations of Ahaz. The long period of idolatry during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon made it necessary to do this work again. Josiah was the last king,

however, to prepare it for the worship of Jehovah, for it was exactly thirty-five years after he commenced to repair the temple till it was finally destroyed.

The Last of the True Kings of Judah. "Higher praise is given to him than to and other king, even to Hezekiah, namely, that he 'turned to the Lord with all his heart, and with all his soul, and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses.' Sirach, in his panegyric on the fathers, groups him with David and Hezekiah, besides whom there was no king who did not more or less abandon the law of the Lord. If we take into consideration, on the one hand, that under his two immediate predecessors, Manasseh and Amon, who together reigned for sixty years, apostasy and corruption had been spread far more widely and penetrated far more deeply than under Ahaz, who reigned only sixteen years, and, on the other hand, that Josiah at the time of his accession, was only a boy of eight years, who might be easily influenced and led astray, then it appears to be almost a miracle that he became what he was. Ewald's comment is: 'We cannot reach an accurate notion of the educational development through which he passed during his minority, but the decision and strictness with which he defended and maintained the more austere religion, in the eighteenth year of his reign and the twenty-sixth of his life, show plainly enough that he had early attained to a firm determination in favor of true nobility and manliness of life. It may well be that the grand old history of Israel, with its fundamental truths, as well as the memory of David's greatness, of the marvelous deliverance of Jerusalem from Sennacherib, and of all else which was glorious in the history of his ancestors, had early made a deep impression upon him!' True as this is however, it is not sufficient to account for such a phenomenon as Joash was. His character is, as Hengstenberg says: 'As little to be comprehended on the basis of mere nat-

ural causes as is the existence of Melchizedek . . . in the midst of the Canaanites, who were hastening on with steady tread and ceaseless march toward the consummation of their sins' The conditions which produced Josiah, such as he was, are the same which produced Jeremiah. If it was marvelous that a man like Hezekiah followed a man like Ahaz, it was still more marvelous than an eight-year-old boy like Josiah followed men like Manasseh and Amon, and that he, during all his reign, should have turned 'neither to the right hand nor to the left,' and should have been unexampled in the entire history of the kings . . . If a king like Josiah could not restore the people to its calling, then the monarchy, as an institution, had failed of its object and was

near its end. The kingdom must hasten to its downfall and the threatened judgments must come." (Lange.)

The Influence of His Example. "There is at the top of the Queen's Staircase in Windsor Castle a statue from the studio of Baron Triqueti, of Edward VI, marking with his sceptre a passage in the Bible, which he holds in his left hand, and upon which he earnestly looks. The passage is concerning Josiah. 'Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign, and walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left.' The statue was erected by the will of the late prince, who intended it to convey to his son the divine principles by which the future governor of England should mould his life and reign on the throne of Great Britain." (Hughes.)

THE LESSON STORY.

Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign in Judah. He was the son of Amon, and the grandson of Manasseh. His mother's name was Jedidah, which means "Beloved of God." From the mention of her name, and because of the piety of his life from childhood, it is natural to infer that she had much to do with his early training. He is said to have walked perfectly before the Lord: "He turned not to the right nor to the left." Living in an age so evil and amid such corrupt surroundings, Josiah's life reminds us of the white flower which blooms in spotless purity in the black soil of the coal mines. Such a life as that of Josiah, of Samuel and of Timothy, proves the value of early religious training, and shows the vanity of "sowing wild oats" in youth. We find this young king of Judah at the age of sixteen earnestly seeking "the God of his fathers," and at twenty waging a vigorous warfare against idolatry.

Beginning with Judah, he extended the work of destruction into Israel even "as far as Naphtali." The altars, groves and

statues were thrown down and destroyed, the molten images were ground to powder, and their dust sprinkled on the graves of their worshipers, in the king's presence; and the bones of the idolatrous priests were disinterred, and burned upon their own altars." This work of exterminating idols and idolatry was continued for six years. From the bitter complaints of the prophets of his day, Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and others, things must have been in a deplorable condition. However, in all of his efforts toward reform, Josiah was supported by a band of faithful helpers. Among his wise counselors were Jeremiah the prophet, Shaphan the scribe, and Hilkiah the high priest. After his reform, which seems to have been quite as radical as had been that of his great-grandfather Hezekiah, he next undertook the work of cleansing and repairing the temple. Two and a half centuries had passed since it was repaired by Joash, and through much neglect in the reigns of Ahaz, Manasseh and Amon, it had again fallen into sad decay. Yet Josiah took up the task with determina-

tion. Offerings were given by the people to the doorkeepers of the temple, then paid over by the high priest to reliable contractors, who superintended the carpenters and saw that

their work was faithfully done. It was at this time, when the temple repairs were in progress, that an important discovery was made, about which we shall study in our next lesson.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. How did Manasseh's idolatries compare with those of other nations?
2. Why did his apostasy seem so horrible and inexcusable?
3. What particular irreverence did he show for God's house?
4. What means did the Lord employ

by which to cure his apostasy?

5. What evidence did he give of true repentance?

6. What interest do the angels feel in the repentance of sinners? Luke 15:10.

7. Tell in few words what you understand by acceptable repentance.

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. How old was Joash when he began to reign and how long was he king? 2 Chron. 34:1.

2. What splendid testimony is given concerning him? 2 Chron. 34:2.

3. What very early conduct on his part is mentioned and commended? 2 Chron. 34:3.

4. What great work did he undertake at the tender age of twelve? 2 Chron. 34:3.

5. What showed his warm personal interest in the reforms? 2 Chron. 34:4.

6. What particular emphasis did he give to his abhorrence of idolatry? 2 Chron. 34:5.

7. What was the territorial extent of

his destructive ministry? 2 Chron. 34:6, 7.

8. What action signalized the eighteenth year of his reign? 2 Chron. 34:8.

9. What three persons did he send to repair the temple? 2 Chron. 34:8.

10. To whom did they go and what did they deliver to him? 2 Chron. 34:9.

11. Why did the temple need so many and frequent repairs? 2 Chron. 34:11.

12. What is said of the workmen and their work? 2 Chron. 34:12.

13. Who beside workmen and overseers were provided, and for what? 2 Chron. 34:12.

14. What lesson may we here learn as to the value and necessity of system in the work of the Lord? 2 Chron. 34:13.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. While we are not through with the life of Josiah with the close of this lesson, there are some very suggestive principles disclosed in the story of his early life. It is in striking contrast with the reign of Manasseh, whose youthful days were misused and who had to be disciplined in bitterness and distress to lead him to repentance. It reminds one of the normal and perfect life of Jesus, whose

childhood was crowned with duties done and the will of the Father obeyed with joy and love. He did always the things that pleased the Father. It was his meat—the very joy and business of his life—to do the will of him that sent him. At his home in Nazareth he was subject to his parents. At twelve he was constrained to be about his Father's business and to inquire in his Father's house. At thirty

he was owned of the Father as his beloved Son, in whom he was well pleased. Consecration from the dawn of volition—happy, sweet consecration—is the really normal quality of childhood. Josiah exhibited the normal piety that should characterize childhood. It was spontaneous, graceful, and indicative of moral health. Timothy knew the Scriptures as a child, and as a child evidenced true and abiding faith in God. Mothers and grandmothers, as well as fathers and teachers, should, like Eunice and Lois, communicate to the little children under their charge their intelligent faith in God and his promises. The history of the Church furnishes multitudes of pure, obedient, glad children whose delight was in the Lord.

2. Not one line of Scripture, either in the New nor in the Old Testament, can be found in favor of the postponement of obedience from childhood to middle age. If a child passes the age of twelve without the hearty acceptance of Christ as

his personal Saviour—especially if he have been well taught—he is prone to harden his heart against the spirit and duty of obedience. The writer has known many parents to regret the fact that they had not encouraged their children at an early age to publicly confess the Lord and enter upon his service. Spurgeon said he had known many who started late in God's service to backslide, but had never known one who started early in life to fall away. That was his observation, but may not be the same in every case. However, we may be sure that in the very great majority of cases piety will be the better and more steadfast in ratio to its early beginning. Young piety is not identical with old piety. The piety of the boy must not be dreadfully solemn and antique. True piety makes a boy natural, happy, and, withal, good. It ought not to make him sanctimonious in tone or look, but honest, appreciative of the Father's goodness, and should make his youth a good foundation for Christian manhood.

THE FINDING OF THE BOOK OF THE LAW.

2 Chron. 34:14-33. (Print 14-21, 29-33.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Thy word have I laid up in my heart, that I might not sin against thee. Ps. 119:11.

Memory Verse—21. **Suggested Readings**—Chapters 34, 35. **Time**—621 B. C. **Persons**—Hilkiah, Shaphan, Josiah, Ahikam, Abdon, Asaiah, Huldah, the people, priests and Levites. **Place**—Jerusalem, the second quarter of the city.

DAILY READINGS.

July 24.... M—2 Chron. 34:14-33—The Finding of the Book of the Law.

July 25.... T—Deut. 28:1-19—The Blessings and the Cursings of the Law.

July 26.... W—2 Chron. 34:29-33; 2 Kings 23:1-3—Making a Covenant Before the Lord.

July 27.... T—2 Chron. 35:1-19—Celebrating the Passover.

July 28.... F—2 Kings 23:4-20—Destroying the High Places.

July 29.... S—2 Kings 23:24-27—No King Before That Turned like Him to the Lord.

July 30.... S—2 Chron. 35:20-27; 2 Kings 23:28-30—Josiah Lamented by all Israel.

TOPOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Both Kings (22:14) and Chronicles state that Huldah the prophetess dwelt in *Misneh*. In the authorized version this is translated the "college" in defense of the belief of the authors of the Targum, for they explained this word as denoting the school of the prophets. It is extremely doubtful, however, whether

such an institution ever existed. The prophet Zephaniah mentions this in such a way as to indicate quite clearly that it was a section or district of the city, and the revisers have accordingly, in agreement with the meaning of the word, translated it the "second quarter." There is no knowledge as to the location of this suburb or district of the city.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

The previous lesson gave us information about the development in righteousness of Josiah king of Judah. In the eighteenth year of his reign he commenced a restoration of the worship of Jehovah. He had previously purged the land of all idolatrous shrines and objects. He then inaugurated a thorough overhauling of the temple and a restoration of those parts of it which, owing to neglect or mutilation by idolatrous kings, were in need of repair. This led to a thorough cleaning of the temple, in the process of

which every part of it was searched and much rubbish was carried out. In some part of the temple, not specified, the priest Hilkiah discovered a copy of the law of Jehovah. That such a law existed was known to the king and priests, but for a number of years its contents had been a matter of oral tradition. It had been three-quarters of a century since Jehovah has been worshiped in the temple, and during much of that time Manasseh drenched Jerusalem in the blood of those who were faithful to him. In the course

14 And when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of Jehovah, Hilkiah the priest found the book of the law of Jehovah *given* by Moses. 15 And Hilkiah answered and

said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the book of the law in the house of Jehovah. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan. 16 And Shaphan carried the book to the king, and moreover brought

of time the worship of Jehovah with its forms and ceremonies had become a memory only. Every known copy of the law had disappeared. When, eighteen years before the incident narrated in our lesson, Josiah came to the throne, and eight years later "began to seek after the God of David his father," the only source of knowledge as to what was proper to introduce in the worship of Jehovah was the memory of priests and pious persons. It is not, therefore, improbable that many idolatrous rites were retained and many things were omitted from the worship which a more perfect knowledge taught them were essential. Under these circumstances, therefore, the book of the law was brought to light. The implication is that it was discovered where some one had hidden it. Guided by it, Josiah carries out a reformation, the details of which show how far the worship of Jehovah as then constituted differed from that worship in the early part of his reign. This lesson tells of the discovery of the law and of its first impression and of the solemn covenant entered into to keep in all details its requirements.

The Prophetess Huldah. This prophetess is known for her connection with this incident only. There were other prophets of Josiah's time. Jeremiah had been a prophet for five years at the time of this incident (Jer. 1:1). Zephaniah was also active at this period (1:1). The ground for the choice of Huldah instead of these is probably indicated by the statement that she dwelt in the second quarter. Jeremiah lived in Anathoth, some miles distant from Jerusalem (1:1). The home of Zephaniah is not known. He was probably not a native of Jerusalem. Neither of them was immediately accessible, and the circumstances demanded haste. But Huldah lived in the city, and it required but little time to reach her. She, therefore, rather than others, was consulted. Her family connection and her husband's position are mentioned in order to show her worthiness. The name of her husband and two of his ancestors are mentioned, but of them we now know nothing further. Her husband was keeper of the wardrobe, but the text does not state whether of that of the king or the priests.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 14. Hilkiah the priest found the *answer* is not always used in the Bible book: It seems from this that the book was found while the money was being gathered from its places of deposit. **The book of the law:** Not merely a book, but the book, the one known and reputed to be the Book of God. **Given by Moses:** Believed by the author of Chronicles to have Moses as its author.

15. Hilkiah answered: The word "an-

in the sense of a reply to a speech or question, but sometimes, as here, a carrying of matter to a further stage. Hilkiah delivered the book: In Kings we are told that Shaphan read it.

16. "Shaphan, bringing the book with him, comes and gives a calm account of the business on which he had been sent at first, viz., the inquiry and ar-

back word to the king, saying, All that was committed to thy servants, they are doing. 17 And they have emptied out the money that was found in the house of Jehovah, and have delivered it into the hand of the overseers, and into the hand of the workmen. 18 And Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest hath delivered me a book. And Shaphan read therein before the king. 19 And it came to pass, when the king

had heard the words of the law, that he rent his clothes. 20 And the king commanded Hilkiah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah the king's servant, saying, 21 Go ye, inquire of Jehovah for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found; for great is the wrath of Jehovah that is poured out upon us, because our fathers

rangement about the money which had been gathered. When that part of the business is dispatched, he tells the king concerning the book that has been discovered."

17. They have emptied out the money: The verb indicates that Shaphan and Hilkiah poured the money out of the chests, in which it had been dropped, and then determined how much was in hand for the restoration. **Overseers . . . workmen:** The contractors and laborers.

18. A book: Though Shaphan speaks of a book, it is certain, since he had read it, that he knew what book it was. He speaks thus indefinitely so as not to startle the king too much at once. **Shaphan read therein:** That is, he read portions of it.

19. He rent his clothes: It is manifest that there was something in the book which Josiah had not known before. That which impressed him so deeply, and caused him distress of mind, was, according to verse 27, "words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof." Quite probably some such passage as Deut. 28 was read. In this chapter Israel is told that if it does not hearken to the voice of God to obey all of his commandments, "all of these curses shall come upon thee and overtake thee" (v. 15). There is then item-

ized calamities upon almost every human activity and interest. There is no other passage in the law so calculated to arouse such distress of mind as Josiah felt.

20. Ahikam the son of Shaphan: Ahikam must have been a man of ripe years to be sent on such an errand with the high priest Hilkiah. Shaphan, his father, was therefore a man of advanced age. The son of Ahikam was appointed governor of Judah by the Assyrians when Jerusalem fell (Jer. 39:14). **Abdon the son of Micah:** Called Achbor the son of Micah in Kings. Not mentioned elsewhere. **Asaiah the king's servant:** Not again mentioned. His office indicates some one in close attendance upon the king.

21. Inquire of Jehovah: He does not specify the way. They inquired through the prophetess. **Our fathers:** Manasseh, Amon, and the men of their generation.

22-28. These verses relate that Hilkiah and his companions went to Huldah the prophetess, who gave them a message to Josiah to the effect that all those curses recorded in the book should be brought upon the people of Jerusalem and Judah, but that he, because of his tender heart, should be spared and should go to his grave in peace without seeing any of his nation's woes. This message was brought to Josiah.

have not kept the word of Jehovah, to do according unto all that is written in this book.

29 Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. 30 And the king went up to the house of Jehovah, and all the men of Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, both great and small: and he read in their ears all the words of the book of the covenant that was found in the house of Jehovah. 31 And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before Jehovah, to walk after Jehovah, and to keep his commandments, and

his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book. 32 And he caused all that were found in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the covenant of God, the God of their fathers. 33 And Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel, and made all that were found in Israel to serve, even to serve Jehovah their God. All his days they departed not from following Jehovah, the God of their fathers.

(American Standard Revised Version. Copyright, 1901, by Thomas Nelson & Sons.)

29. The entire proceeding of ratifying the covenant is quite similar to the ratification of another covenant under Joash (2 Kings 11:14-17).

30. **The Levites:** The book of Kings mentions in the account of this gathering *prophets* instead of Levites. Otherwise the lists are the same. **Great and small:** This means rich and poor. **The book of the covenant:** This phrase is found in Ex. 24:7 and refers to Ex. 20 to 23. In time it would include more than these chapters, being the name for the entire body of the law.

31. **Stood in his place:** Kings says he stood by the pillar. Joash, when crowned, also stood by the pillar (2 Kings 11:14). **Made a covenant:** Joash, through his regent, made a similar covenant (2 Kings 11:17).

32. **To stand to it:** To live and worship according to the law.

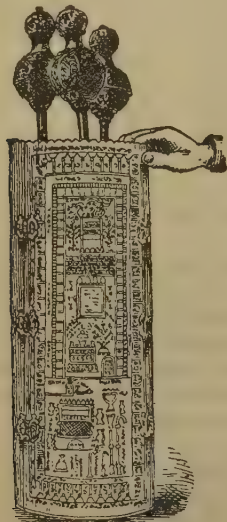
33. Josiah completed the work of destroying the idols and their places of worship, which he had commenced in the twelfth year of his reign. A fuller account of this reformation work is found in 2 Kings 23:4-20.

COMMENTS.

The Critical Use of this Incident. Many teachers will be perplexed as to what should be said about the use of this passage by biblical critics, especially by those of the newer schools, who hold to the late date of the books of the Pentateuch. This passage is so prominent in the discussions on these topics that many will feel that to ignore this use of the passage will prove that the teacher is either ignorant or unfair. It may be necessary to say something about

the prominence of the passage in current critical discussions, though the average teacher should say nothing, either to prove or disprove any theory as to date or authorship of any of the Old Testament books. There are a number of religious purposes which the narrative may be made to serve, all of which will probably be neutralized, if not nullified, by too careful attention to the historical and critical questions involved. The fact is that both sides of the con-

troversy have sought to make the language of this passage prove or disprove more than a legitimate and natural construction of it warrants. The critical questions are two: (1) Was the book of the Law discovered by Hilkiah our Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible, as we now have them? or was

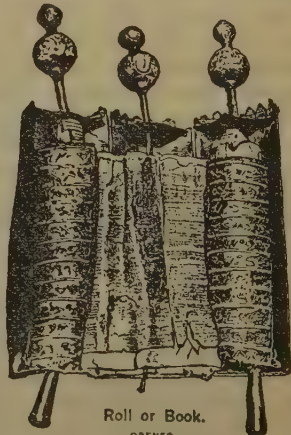


Roll or Book.
CLOSED.

it our book of Deuteronomy alone, or some earlier recension of the Pentateuch? (2) Was this finding of the book the rediscovery of an old book, or the finding of a book which had never been used before? This passage does not contain sufficient information to enable us to answer either of these questions dogmatically. No one will deny that the book of Deuteronomy was included in this book discovered. Some of the acts of Josiah's reform point unmistakably to this book. But it does not follow from this that it was the only book contained in the roll. All that we may be certain about is what is expressly stated; namely, that Hilkiah found in the temple a book; that he pro-

nounced this book to be the book of the law of Jehovah, and that it purported to be, or was believed to be, from the hand of Moses. The Hebrew word for "find" may mean the rediscovery of something lost or the discovery of it for the first time. So this word does not settle the controversy. Almost every prominent expression in this narrative has been pressed by zealous advocates, either for or against both sides of the controversy. To settle it requires detailed and minute knowledge of many points not found in this passage, and the information here is too meager to justify any teacher in attempting a discussion and adjustment of the question of the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.

Importance of this Incident. The discovery of this book, in spite of its seeming insignificance, was, after all, an event of the first importance for all of the subsequent history of Israel. Although Josiah had turned to the Lord and at-



Roll or Book.
OPENED.

tempted to inaugurate a reform, yet this discovery showed him how inadequate his previous steps had been. Hence he took severer steps against idolatry and restored, in all of its completeness, the worship of Jehovah. His use of this book gave to it such authority that for all

future time, and in spite of renewed apostasy, it held the respect of the nation and guided them in things pertaining to God. The Jewish faith of later times was indisputably based upon it.

Nature of this Reformation. "The abolition of idolatry and of the illegitimate Jehovah-worship under Josiah is distinguished from every earlier attempt of the kind, even from that under Hezekiah, by the fact that it was far more thorough. It extended not only to the kingdom of Judah, but also to the former kingdom of Israel; not only to the public, but also to the private life of the people. The evil was everywhere to be torn out, roots and all. Nothing which could perpetuate the memory of heathen, or of illegitimate Jehovah-worship, remained standing. All the places of worship, all the images, all the utensils, were not only destroyed, but also defiled; even the ashes were thrown into the river at an unclean place, that they might be borne away forever. The idol-priests themselves were slain, and the bones of those who were already dead were taken out of the graves and burned. The priests of Jehovah who had performed their functions upon the heights were deposed from their office and dignity, and were not allowed to sacrifice any more at the altar of Jehovah." (Länge.)

Only Partial Success. In spite of the fact that it was based upon the law of Jehovah and was carried out in accord with its injunctions, the reformation of Josiah was almost a complete failure.

He aimed at the conversion of his people, but in this he did not succeed. They were too deeply sunken in idolatry. With his death Judah commenced to hurl itself down to its speedy ruin. No prophet praises the reform of Josiah. It seems to have left no permanent trace upon the national history, and yet in the providence of God it did much good. It gave to the adherents of the true faith a breathing spell and enabled them to gather strength for the greater trial of their faith which came in the Babylonian captivity. In this then consists the work of Josiah, and the high praise of him given by the divine historian is justified.

An Historical Parallel. The effect produced on Josiah by this discovery of the law has a parallel in the effect produced on Luther by the discovery of a Latin Bible in the library of the Augustine Convent at Erfurt. Before this there had been religion enough of a kind in Luther's life. He knew that there was a Bible and was taught to believe that the religious acts in which he engaged were based upon the written word. A short perusal of the printed page showed him the difference between the traditional, customary acts of worship and the true. It taught him that true religion was something different from fasts, vigils and singing masses, and that justification was found not in these, but in faith. This discovery of the hidden Bible was one of the first steps to the Protestant Reformation, just as the finding of the book of the Law was that which led to Josiah's reformation.

THE LESSON STORY.

In the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign he began to repair the temple. It was while this work was in progress that the most momentous event of his reign occurred, the discovery of the Book of the Law. It was found by Hilkiah the priest, as he was clearing away some rubbish in the temple, and given to Shaphan the

scribe who, seeing in its discovery an event of deep national importance, took it forthwith to the king, and at his request read it aloud in his presence. It is hard for one to realize the full force of this discovery. King and people had been living in ignorance of the Book; many had not even known of its exist-

ence, and to many others its contents had been only a matter of tradition. We may imagine how great was the spiritual darkness of that time when for seventy-five years there had been no worship of Jehovah in the temple, and no distribution of his written law among the people. As Shaphan read of the threatened destruction and captivity which should befall the nation because of its idolatry, the words of terrible denunciation fell like sharp arrows upon the sensitive spirit of Josiah. It is no wonder that he should have rent his garments and sent in haste in search of some prophet to expound their meaning. No time was to be lost; and Huldah, the wife of Shallum, keeper of the sacred vestments, who lived in the suburbs of Jerusalem, was consulted. Her reply was but a confirmation of Josiah's fears; yet it was softened by a word of personal comfort to the king. Because he had shown a tender heart by humbling himself before the divine threatenings, "therefore he should be gathered to his fathers in peace, and not see the evil that was coming on

Jerusalem." The king could find no rest while his people remained ignorant concerning the newly-discovered Book of the Law; so he called together a solemn assembly in the temple, that they, too, might hear it read. This was followed by the renewal of their covenant with Jehovah, and by the most radical reform ever known to the nation. King and people worked with untiring zeal, and in the end not a vestige of idolatry could be found in all the land.

At the close of the reformation, the Passover feast was observed in Jerusalem, according to the commandment found in the Book of the Law. This feast, "the greatest and most exact that had been kept since the time of Moses, was the last important religious act of the nation in the time preceding the captivity."

Josiah did not survive many years his reformation. He was slain in battle at Megiddo by an Egyptian archer. His death filled Judah with mourning, for in the loss of its brave king the nation's brightest hopes were blighted.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. Name from memory three of the best kings of Judah.

2. How does Josiah rank among them as to morality and piety?

3. How does genuine piety in a child differ from real piety in a mature man?

4. How early in life should a child, properly instructed, unite with the church?

5. What is the general teaching of Scripture as to early devotion to God?

6. Would it not be more scriptural to speak of early *obedience* to God?

7. Should church attendance be compulsory for children?

Note: The habit of church attendance and attention to the teaching should be thoroughly established. It should be encouraged early and late. The writer was often induced to attend religious meetings to reciprocate the kindnesses of his

sister. He went often to see his young friends. At last the habit of church attendance was established. Parents do not wait for their children to desire to attend the week-day schools before they require them to go. Nothing is more important in children than obedience. When they become older—old enough to understand and be guided by principles instead of precepts—it will be time to appeal to principles. There was a fine and true pedagogical principle in what the Lord said of Abraham and his children: "I know Abraham, that he will command his children and his household after him; and they will keep the way of the Lord to do righteousness and judgment." Parents and teachers should set each a good example and then kindly require the children under their care to follow.

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. In making repairs upon the temple, especially in bringing out the money brought into the house of the Lord, what great treasure was found? 2 Chron. 34:14.

2. What person had the distinguished honor of finding it? 2 Chron. 34:14.

3. What would the loss of the Book of the Law of the Lord indicate?

4. To whom did Hilkiah tell the secret and to whom did he give the book? 2 Chron. 34:15.

5. To whom was the book next delivered and with it what message? 2 Chron. 34:16, 17.

6. What did the scribe tell the king and what did he read to him? 2 Chron. 34:18.

7. What effect did the reading of the law have upon the king? 2 Chron. 34:19.

8. What inquiry did the king ask four of his servants to make? 2 Chron. 34:21.

9. What did the king say had been

poured out upon the nation, and why? 2 Chron. 34:21.

10. To whom did the persons go whom the king commanded? 2 Chron. 34:22.

11. What was the response they received to their inquiry? 2 Chron. 34:23-28.

12. What curses would be brought upon the nation, and why? Deut. 28:15-68; 2 Chron. 34:24, 25.

13. What kindness was promised unto Josiah, and for what reason? 2 Chron. 34:27, 28.

14. Then what did king Josiah do? Where did he go, and what did he read? 2 Chron. 34:29, 30.

15. What covenant then did king Josiah make? 2 Chron. 34:31.

16. What did he cause the people to do, and were they willing to obey him? 2 Chron. 34:32.

17. What further reform did the king accomplish, and with what result? 2 Chron. 34:33.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. Perhaps the most important suggestion in connection with this lesson is the very great value of the word of God. To many and for long seasons it has been practically lost. It may lie on the table and yet be lost. It may be read from the pulpit and yet its message may fall upon deaf ears and be lost. It may be accepted theoretically in the home and yet be left unread, unexplained and unapplied. It may be accepted in theory by the preacher who, at the same time, may not tell its message and may not utter its practical admonitions and warnings. The Sunday-school may manifest a great deal of enthusiasm and yet not feed daily upon the word of God as the very bread of life. "Man shall not live by bread alone," said Jesus, "but by every word of God shall he live."

2. God will take care of the faithful

—like Josiah—whatever the fathers or the nation may have done. Each individual must give account of himself unto God. Josiah himself kept the law according to his light and opportunity. He also influenced others, the whole nation as far as practicable, to obey God. Faithfulness is not fulfilled in doing righteously toward God in one's self, in purity, devotion, worship, growth in grace; it requires attention to and deep interest in one's neighbors. The hand, the foot, the eye, the ear, must sympathize with and co-operate with the whole body in order to perform its duty.

3. The stream of evils flowing from sin can not always and altogether be stayed. It is still true that "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." It is true that even a repentant life will not always arrest a harvest of suffering,

sorrow and weakness on account of evil seed long sown in the flesh. It is better not to sow to the flesh. Let no one excuse his sins, for God will not excuse. The desire for God and his righteousness should be daily fostered and increased by exercise and through the word of God. God is merciful to each repentant soul, as he was to Manasseh. But the life of Josiah, earnest, sincere, steadfast and devout, is possible, and infinitely superior to that of Manasseh.

With Christ to illuminate and strength-

en us how much better should we be than king Josiah! "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

There is a possibility that under God's wonderful grace and motive one may turn his past experience under sin into a stimulus and, through sorrow for sin and hatred of iniquity, may make greater progress than if he had not been made to feel the bitterness and guilt of his wrongdoing. But this doctrine, as the Scriptures show, may be abused to one's loss and undoing.

Lesson VI.

August 6.

JEREMIAH TRIED AND ACQUITTED.

Jeremiah 26. (Print verses 7-19.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Jehovah is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? Ps. 27:1.**Memory Verses**—13, 14. **Time**—607 B. C. **Persons**—Jeremiah, the priests, the prophets, the princes and the people. **Places**—The king's house, the house of Jehovah and the new gate of Jehovah's house.**DAILY READINGS.**

.....g .3ny M—Jer. 26:1-24—Jeremiah Tried and Acquitted.

Aug. 4.....T—Jer. 25:1-14—Jeremiah's Faithful Warning.

Aug. 2.....W—Micah 3:1-12—The Warning of Micah, the Morashtite.

July 31.....T—Mal. 1:1-14—The Warning of Malachi.

.....I .3ny F—Matt. 26:57-68—Jesus Adjudged Guilty of Blasphemy.

Aug. 5.....S—Acts 6:8-7:60—Stephen Adjudged Guilty of Blasphemy.

Aug. 6.....S—Ps. 62:1-12—God is the Rock of my Strength.

TOPOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

The passing or going from the palace of the king to the temple court is described by the one word *up* (v. 10). At another time Jeremiah was commanded by Jehovah to do *down* from the temple to the palace (22:1). According to Ezekiel 43:8, the two buildings were contiguous with the temple on the north of the palace. The former crowned the top of the mountain and the latter stood on

the southern slope below. The session of the court was held in "the entry of the new gate of Jehovah's house." It seems from Jer. 36:10 that this was a gate leading from the outer or lower court into the upper or inner court of the temple. Since the northern gate was known as the Benjamin gate (Jer. 20:2), this new gate was probably on the south or east. It was built by Jotham about a century before (2 Kings 15:35).

THE PROPHET JEREMIAH.

Jeremiah was the prophet of the decline and fall of the kingdom of Judah." His call to become a prophet took place in the thirteenth year of Josiah (1:2), which was five years before the finding of the Book of the Law and Josiah's great reform, and eighteen years before this king's death, in 608 B. C. He was of priestly origin and sprang from a community of priests settled at Anathoth, three miles northeast of Jerusalem (1:1; 1 Kings 2:26). Here his family owned land (32:7). Of Jeremiah's life during the eighteen years, from his call to the death of Josiah, we know practically nothing, though there are some chapters of his book which

undoubtedly belong to this period. In 11:1-8 he seems to allude to the Book of the Law which Hilkiah discovered, though beyond this he makes no reference to Josiah's reform. He looks upon the nation at this period of his life as corrupt and hopelessly hardened against the pleading of God. The foe which is to avenge their sin is at the door and will certainly accomplish his task. In 608 Josiah met his death on the plain of Megiddo in a battle with Pharaoh-Neco of Egypt. He had foolishly attempted to stop the advance of the Egyptian army into Asia. Josiah left three sons, but for some reason the nation preferred the youngest, Jehoahaz, to either of his older brothers. This was probably because he

was known to be more antagonistic to Egypt. At least after a reign of three months he was deposed and exiled by Pharaoh-Neco, and his older brother, Jehoiakim, though not Josiah's oldest son, was permitted to ascend the throne. He reigned for eleven years. The incident

which constitutes this lesson is dated as occurring at "the beginning of the reign of Jehoiakim." Since he does not have any part in the events of this lesson, it is not necessary here to discuss his character, but this is reserved for the next lesson.

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

Jeremiah had now been a prophet for almost twenty years. He had repeatedly denounced the sins of the people and had predicted doom, but up to this time there is no mention of opposition on the part of any of the ruling or powerful classes. He had singled out for a special denunciation the priests and the prophets, and they are the ones who now arrest and prosecute him. In the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign he received a command to speak a message in the court of Jehovah's house (v. 2), to the multitude that had assembled from the cities of Judah. The occasion was probably one of the three annual feasts, at which time many would be present. Jeremiah is told to deliver his message without diminishing it a word, but the message itself is not given, except in a very abbreviated form. That which aroused the ire of the priests and prophets was the threat that Jerusalem should be destroyed as Shiloh had been. In chapter seven this same threat is repeated, and a false security, based upon the presence of the temple in Jerusalem, is denounced. If this chapter does not contain the actual sermon which Jeremiah delivered on this occasion, it is one preached upon the same subject, in the same place (7:2), to the same people and for the same purpose. By studying some of the things which he uttered, as

recorded in the seventh chapter, we may learn what provoked the indignation of the priests and prophets. He told them first that the condition of peacefully abiding in their land and retaining Jehovah's favor was not in having the temple in their midst, but in amendment of their ways and doings, in execution of justice between a man and his neighbor, and in kindness and righteousness towards all classes. He goes farther and says that Jehovah is not compelled to protect his temple. There was a house of God at Shiloh, but that city and house were destroyed. So will he destroy Jerusalem and the temple unless they repent. Jehovah further forbids the prophet from interceding on behalf of his people, for they are wholly given over to idolatry, and have been from the time that God brought them out of Egypt. In some such way as this Jeremiah spoke in the court of Jehovah's house and ended with the words: "I will make this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth." For this Jeremiah was arrested. Those who led the opposition to him were the priests and the prophets, the leaders in the religious life of the nation. The people, in large number, were opposed to him also, though the "all" of v. 8 is not to be taken literally, for later the people appear favorable to him (v. 16).

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 7. The priests: Though Jeremiah belonged to a priestly family, they always opposed him. They were very

corrupt at this time. **The prophets:** They were false prophets, who did not believe that disaster was approaching Jerusalem,

7 And the priests and the prophets and all the people heard Jeremiah speaking these words in the house of Jehovah.

8 And it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that Jehovah had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people laid hold on him, saying, Thou shalt surely die.

9 Why hast thou prophesied in the name of Jehovah, saying, 'This house shall be like Shiloh, and this city shall be desolate, without inhabitant?' And all the people were gathered unto Jeremiah in the house of Jehovah.

10 And when the princes of Judah heard these things, they came up from the king's house unto the house of Jehovah; and they sat in the entry of the new gate of Jehovah's house. 11 Then spake the priests and the prophets unto the princes and to all the people, saying, This man is worthy of death; for he hath prophesied against this city, as ye have heard with your ears. 12 Then spake Jeremiah unto all the princes and to all the people, saying, Jehovah sent me to prophesy against this house and against this city all the words that ye have heard. 13 Now therefore amend your ways and

Cf. 6:13-14; 14:13-14. The Septuagint actually reads *false prophets*. **The people:** They later appear as siding with the princes and as friendly to Jeremiah (vs. 11, 12, 16). Cf. v. 8.

8. **Jeremiah had made an end:** Though so bitterly opposed to him, they did not interfere till he had finished. This shows their reverence for one who claimed to be a prophet of God. **Thou shalt surely die:** This was the penalty pronounced by the law against the prophet who proclaimed a message that God had not commanded him to speak (Deut. 18:20). They did not believe that God would destroy his temple, hence Jeremiah's message, as they thought, could not be from God.

9. **Prophesied in the name of Jehovah:** This they believed was the error of Jeremiah. Such a message was contrary to their conception of the nature and actions of God. **Like Shiloh:** Which seems to have been utterly destroyed by the Philistines in the days of Eli. 1 Sam. 4:10-11. Cf. Ps. 78:60, 61; Jer. 7:12, 14. **Gathered unto Jeremiah:** Not to oppose, but to hear him. **Princes of Judah:** Probably the heads of important families, who exercised certain judicial func-

tions. This body of princes was the forerunner of the Sanhedrin which became prominent after the captivity. **Came up:** This and 22:1 show that the temple was on higher ground than the palace. **The entry of the new gate:** The open space about a gate was the ordinary place for trials and business transactions.

11. **Prophesied against this city:** This was always regarded by the Jews as treason. Cf. Acts 6:13. **As ye have heard:** This was evidently addressed to the people only, for they had heard, but not the princes.

12. **Jehovah sent me to prophesy:** His defense is that he received his message from God, and hence it is true. This is a flat contradiction of the charge. Cf. v. 9.

13. The prophet spends but little time in his own defense. He passes on at once to the main task of a prophet, viz., warning and exhortation. **Your ways and your doings:** A favorite expression with Jeremiah. It means settled habits and individual acts. **Jehovah will repent him of the evil:** The destruction of Jerusalem was not inevitably and unchangeably fixed. Their repentance would remove the cause and thus avert the catastrophe.

your doings, and obey the voice of Jehovah your God; and Jehovah will repent him of the evil that he hath pronounced against you. 14 But as for me, behold, I am in your hand: do with me as is good and right in your eyes. 15 Only know ye for certain that, if ye put me to death, ye will bring innocent blood upon yourselves, and upon this city, and upon the inhabitants thereof; for of a truth Jehovah hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears.

16 Then said the princes and all the people unto the priests and to the prophets: This man is not worthy of death; for he hath spoken to us in the name of

Jehovah our God. 17 Then rose up certain of the elders of the land, and spake to all the assembly of the people, saying, 18 Micah the Morashtite prophesied in the days of Hezekiah king of Judah; and he spake to all the people of Judah, saying, Thus saith Jehovah of hosts: Zion shall be plowed as a field, and Jerusalem shall become heaps, and the mountain of the house as the high places of a forest. 19 Did Hezekiah king of Judah and all Judah put him to death? did he not fear Jehovah, and entreat the favor of Jehovah, and Jehovah repented him of the evil which he had pronounced against them? Thus should we commit great evil against our own souls.

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14. In your hands: In your power to do with me as you choose. **Do unto me as is good**, etc.: Jeremiah will not plead for his own life. His attitude is, "strike if you will, but hear me."

15. This is a noble speech. It shows the conviction and firmness with which Jeremiah believed his message.

16. All the people: Neither here nor in v. 8 is the *all* to be taken as implying more than a large number. **This man is not worthy of death**: This is their decision. They are convinced that Jeremiah was a true prophet. They reached this conclusion from his own words and bearing.

17. Certain of the elders: They were closer to the people than the princes,

and their words would consequently have greater weight with the populace.

18. Micah the Morashite: The prophet Micah, the author of the book that bears this name. In the days of Hezekiah: This is the time of Micah's activity dated. **Zion shall be plowed**, etc.: He, too, had prophesied the destruction of Jerusalem. This language may be found in Micah 3:12.

19. The precedent of Hezekiah was appealed to. He did not punish Micah, neither should Jeremiah now be punished. He repented and prayed to Jehovah, and the land was spared; they should imitate his example. It should be noted that they perfectly understood that a prophetic message might be altered through repentance of the people.

COMMENTS.

Jeremiah's Position. "Timid, shrink-
ing, and sensitive by nature, love of his
country and enthusiasm for Jehovah gave
him a courage and constancy which no
danger appalled. He might, in his
bosom, feel the humility of a child, and

think himself unable to speak in pub-
lic; he might wish that his head were
water and his eyes a fountain of tears,
that he might weep day and night for
the daughter of his people. He might
sigh for a 'lodge in the wilderness,' to

escape from the sin around him, but all this passed away when he appeared before his fellow citizens. In the presence of king, or prince, or priest, or populace he was, as God had predicted, defiant as a fortified town, and immovable as a pillar of iron or walls of brass. Fearless and undismayed he 'girt up his loins, and arose and spake' to all classes and ranks, from day to day, whenever opportunity offered, warning and rebuking with noble directness and plainness. Such fidelity, amidst a generation so fallen, bore its natural fruit in the hatred of those whose sins were assailed. The nobles were furious at his exposure of their lawless violence and cold self-indulgence. The people at large resented indignantly his warnings that their superstitious trust in the temple, as an inviolable safeguard from public danger, was mere self-deception; that their sacrifices were not accepted by God; that their glory as the chosen people would not save them; that they, the circumcised, would share the same fate for their sins as the uncircumcised heathen; that the temple itself would be destroyed, as that of Shiloh had been, and that Jerusalem would be reduced to ruins, and they themselves led away as slaves to a foreign land. But he was hated, most of all by the priests and prophets, as one who, while belonging to both orders, spoke ill of the members of each. Class feeling, than which nothing is more bitter, was roused in both to the deadliest intensity against him. Absolute loneliness amidst his fellows, misappreciation of his motives, fierce accusation of sentiments which he abhorred, the consciousness that, while his heart was breaking for love of his country, he was denounced as a traitor by those who were themselves betraying the nation, darkened his life. Sad at soul, he had no desire for any of the pleasures of other men. Unlike priests or prophets, as a rule, he remained unmarried, and

withheld himself from meetings of his fellows, whether for mourning or feasting. The hand of God seemed against him all the day. He felt as if he were a mark for his arrows. He had been led into darkness, and was like one that lived in the gloomy tombs of the long dead. At times it appeared as if God had deceived him, and, in his desolation of soul, he lamented that he had ever been born. His life seemed an utter failure. His words came back to him like an empty sound. No man regarded them." (Geikie.)

The Classes. One fact that is prominent is that the population was divided into classes. There were the priests, the prophets, the princes and the mass of the people. Jeremiah belonged to the order of the priests and the prophets, but they were among the bitterest of his foes. Both classes had at this time sunk to the lowest state of degradation, and because he was pure and upright they vented their rage against him. The prophets were a class of men who followed this calling for selfish and mercenary purposes. The princes appear in this lesson more favorably than they do at a later time, when they were among the bitterest foes of Jeremiah. Probably the counsellors of Josiah were at this time still in their position, and were, like that king, pure and lovers of righteousness, while later Jehoiakim displaced them for persons like-minded with himself. The people, as in all countries and all ages, are fickle and easily swayed. They unite in the arrest of Jeremiah, but join the princes later in giving the prophet a favorable decision.

True and False Patriotism. The accusers of Jeremiah did so on the ground of patriotism. He was arrested because, as they said, "he hath prophesied against this city." There are some who think that to speak adversely of one's native land in any way shows a lack of patriotism. Jeremiah was not of this class.

To admit its wrongs and its sins and to seek to correct these is the highest patriotism. For one now to see the shortcomings of his native land and to seek to correct these is truly higher patriotism than to engage in fulsome praise of it and to declare one's belief in the certainty of its ultimate triumph.

Jeremiah's Defense. The prophet offers but one defense. It is that Jehovah had commanded him to deliver this message. He will do his duty to God whatever they do. "I am in your hands," was his speech to them and his only appeal is that they do right. He is calm and undismayed. He is neither a fanatic courting death, nor is he a coward fleeing from it. He knows and ad-

mits their power, but does not dare them to exercise it. "He is neither anxious for life, nor afraid of death. This surely is the spirit to be gained, if one would be a true witness for God. Jeremiah seems to speak here as one who had gained, for the moment at least, something of the calm of eternity." This calmness of his and his perfect trust in Jehovah must have had considerable influence in gaining for himself a favorable decision.

The Danger was Real. The incident of Uriah is added to show that, though Jeremiah escaped, the danger in which he was had been very real. Another prophet who had taken a similar position was pursued and slain.

THE LESSON STORY.

Jeremiah was called in a trying period of Judah's history. He came into active service five years before Josiah's great reformation, and was a conspicuous figure in the years preceding and in those that followed the fall of the Southern Kingdom. No other prophet of the Old Testament has been so clearly revealed. "His words are concrete with his own life," while many of the other prophets seem as "voices in the air." He was gentle and sensitive, yet in the face of evil, and in the discharge of duty, always brave. His life was full of pathos. The things he longed for—love, companionship, the ties of home—were all denied him. His own townsmen conspired against his life. He was a lover of peace, yet lived all his days in the midst of contention and strife. He loved his nation, yet was branded as a traitor, and thrust into a dungeon to die. At the close of Josiah's reign it became his duty "to discourage every patriotic hope, to stand against the popular side of every question, and to prophesy only defeat and disaster." After the death of Josiah many relapsed into idolatry, cit-

ing his tragic death as a proof of the anger of the gods on account of his radical reforms. To this party Jehoia-kim, the new king, gave his hearty support, and soon idolatry again flourished in Judah. Against the tide of evil Jeremiah protested so earnestly that frequent attempts were made to take his life.

At the beginning of Jehoiakim's evil reign Jeremiah was charged to stand in the court of the temple and declare to the people all the words commanded him. He was to "diminish not a word." Through his prophet, Jehovah would call his people, as he had often called before, to repentance. They should also be warned of the sad destiny awaiting them if they still refused to walk in his law and heed the voice of his prophets. Their "house" should become as desolate as "Shiloh," from which, by reason of the wickedness of Eli's sons, the tabernacle had been removed, and their "city a curse to all the nations of the earth." The message fell like a thunderbolt upon prophets, priests and people, and when the last word had been spoken, they rose up and laid hold upon Jere-

miah, saying, "Thou shalt surely die." The word of doom that their "house should be as Shiloh" and their "city without inhabitants," soon spread throughout Jerusalem. It reached the ears of the princes of Judah in the king's palace, and they hastened to the temple, and stood within the gate. The "priests and prophets," who seem strangely to have been Jeremiah's accusers, then appealed to the "princes and people" to know if he was not worthy of death who had spoken such words of condemnation against them and their city. As no other voice was lifted to plead his cause, the prophet spoke in his own defense, declaring his divine commission, and urging them not to harden themselves against it. Unlike Elijah, in time of danger, Jeremiah made no attempt to run away, so, bravely facing the angry mob, he told them that his life was in their hands; that it was in their power to kill him, but as surely as they did so, upon them and their city should fall the terrible retribution for shedding innocent blood. His defense closed with the solemn assurance that every word

spoken against them had been commanded of Jehovah. Convinced of Jeremiah's innocence, the princes and people cried out, saying: "This man is not worthy of death, for he hath spoken to us in the name of Jehovah our God." After the verdict of "not guilty" had fallen upon the prophet, certain "elders" reminded the people of the time in Hezekiah's reign when Judah had received a similar rebuke from Jehovah, through his prophet, Micah, and had not only spared the prophet's life, but, through prayer and penitence, had been saved from threatened calamity.

In contrast to this, another precedent was given in the case of Urijah, who, having uttered prophecies against king and people, fled into Egypt for safety, and was brought back by Jehoiakim to suffer an ignominious death. We are sure that the princes of Judah appealed to the better precedent, in the reign of good king Hezekiah, for the story ends by saying that "Ahikam the son of Shaphan was with Jeremiah, that they should not give him into the hands of the people to put him to death."

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. Where and by whom was the Book of the Law found in the days of Josiah?
2. To whom was it delivered and by whom read to the king?
3. What did king Josiah do upon hearing the law of Moses read?
4. To whom, later, did the king himself read it?

5. What did the king require of the people more than the mere hearing of the Law?

6. What was the very appropriate Golden Text of the last lesson?

7. How ought we especially as Christians to treat the word of God?

8. Tell some ways in which the Bible may be practically a lost book.

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. In the reign of what king did the events of this lesson occur? Jer. 26:1.
2. What imperative message came from God to Jeremiah? Jer. 26:2.
3. What encouragement in speaking it did God give to him? Jer. 26:3.
4. In what did the Lord always en-

courage his people? Jer. 26:4-6.

5. Whom did the Lord honor as his servants to speak and suffer for him? Jer. 26:5.

6. What warning was to be spoken faithfully to the people? Jer. 26:6.

7. Were the words of the prophet

heard by the people generally? Jer. 26:7.

8. What acute situation was brought about by Jeremiah's sermon? Jer. 26:8.

9. What question was submitted to the prophet and not answered? Jer. 26:9.

10. What persons came from the king's house and heard the charge against and the message of the prophet? Jer. 26:10-12.

11. What did the prophet then tell both the princes and the people? Jer. 26:12, 13.

12. What did the prophet say they might do with him? Jer. 26:14.

13. What warning did he utter

against them if they should kill him? Jer. 26:15.

14. What did the princes and all the people finally decide? Jer. 26:16.

15. What then did certain elders of the land say to the assembly? Jer. 26:17-19.

16. What particular prophet and king were referred to in illustration? Jer. 26:18, 19.

17. What second example—as a blunder—was mentioned? Jer. 26:20-23.

18. What person is named as having stood by the prophet to protect him? Jer. 26:24.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

Our Lord himself was crucified for bearing witness to the truth. The world has destroyed many of its best friends because they testified against its evils.

The attitude of the rulers in Jerusalem toward Jesus was their attitude toward truth. They hated the truth and would crucify it. The truth which the prophet Jeremiah spoke was that most needed in Judah. It was both practical and vital. It was pivotal. "To this end was I born," said Jesus, "and for this cause came I into the world, to bear witness to the truth." We are here for the same purpose. "Ye shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free." To keep the mind open to truth; to cultivate a love and an intuition for it, and to take to apply it to the liberation, edification and joy of the people—this is indeed a worthy endeavor on the part of every teacher. The Sunday-school teacher dispels ignorance, and through the truth applied breaks shackles and sets free. It is true that Jesus died to make us free. Jeremiah, a true patriot, spoke and suffered to make his people free.

The preacher speaking the needed truth boldly and clearly, ought not to expect nor care for popularity. To correct the errors that fetter men; to denounce the oppressions, tyrannies, greed, selfishness

and worldliness, and to show the redemptive, merciful and inspiring spirit of Christ, is worth more than popularity or the gifts of the world.

Stephen, Peter, James, Paul and John suffered for the faithful and practical testimony of Jesus. They spoke the truth in love, but suffered for its declaration. The long line of Christian martyrs whose names may or may not have been preserved in history formed an invaluable manifestation of loyalty to truth. "Take me and do with me as it seemeth good," each witness could say, "only know ye for certain that, if ye put me to death, ye will bring innocent blood upon yourselves . . . for of a truth Jehovah hath sent me unto you to speak all these words in your ears."

The gamblers, liquor dealers, and corrupt politicians, who fatten on iniquity, are not friendly to aggressive churches and preachers of practical and applicable truth. They say, "The preachers should attend to their own business and let ours alone." That were all very well if the business the preachers attack would let others alone. But the business of injuring others is the devil's business, and the Lord's servants are here to destroy the works of the devil and to build up the kingdom of righteousness.

Lesson VII.

August 13.

JEHOIAKIM BURNS THE PROPHET'S BOOK.

Jeremiah 36. (Print vs. 20-32.)

GOLDEN TEXT—The word of our God shall stand forever. Isaiah 40:8.**Memory Verses**—23, 24. **Time**—604-3 B. C. **Persons**—Jeremiah, Baruch, Jehoiakim and officers. **Place**—The temple and the palace in Jerusalem.**DAILY READINGS.**

Aug. 7..... M—Jer. 36:1-8—The Book Commanded to be Made and Read.

Aug. 8..... T—Jer. 36:9-19—The Effect of the Reading upon the Princes.

Aug. 9..... W—Jer. 36:20-26—The Book Burnt by Jehoiakim.

Aug. 10.... T—Jer. 36:27-32—The Book Restored by Order of the Lord.

Aug. 11... F—Isaiah 55:1-13—"My Word shall not Return to me Void."

Aug. 12.... S—2 Kings 22:1-13—The Book of the Law Magnified.

Aug. 13.... S—Ps. 119:1-16—"Thy Word have I Laid up in my Heart."

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

"Jehoiakim was a selfish, unscrupulous ruler, who thought more of enlarging his own palace than of justice and the welfare of his subjects, and had no respect for the prophets of Jehovah, or for their words (26:20-23; 36:23-26). At the beginning of his reign Pharaoh-Neco continued his aggressions upon Syria; but in 605, essaying to cross the Euphrates, he was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar, acting as his father Nabopolassar's general at Carchemish. This defeat gave the final blow to Egyptian ambitions, and assured for the Chaldeans the supremacy of the west. Politically it was the turning point of the age, and was fraught with important consequences for Israel's future.

"Jeremiah at once grasped its significance. He said that Nebuchadnezzar was destined to achieve further successes, and declared emphatically that the whole of Western Asia would fall under his sway (Ch. 25), implying thereby, what he afterwards taught explicitly, that the safety of Judah lay in yielding to the inevitable, and accepting the condition of dependence upon Babylon. Jehoiakim

—not apparently immediately, but when called upon to do so (611 B. C.)—submitted to Nebuchadnezzar, and during three years paid tribute; he then revolted. Marauding bands of Syrians, Moabites, and Ammonites were sent against Judah; but before a regular siege of Jerusalem could be begun, Jehoiakim died.

"The reign of Jehoiakim seems to have been for Jeremiah a time of constant conflict and trial. A whole series of narratives and prophecies can, with greater or less probability, be assigned to it, some testifying to the deep emotion which overcame him, as he realized, more and more clearly, how his country was hastening to its doom; others recounting his vain efforts to reform or (7:16, 11:74, and notably in the dialogue, 14:15) intercede for his people, and others again telling of the experiences, the persecutions (11:16, 15:10, 17:15-18, 20:7-11), the plots against his life (11:18-23, 18:18), his imprisonment in the stocks (20:2), his narrow escape from death (26:11, 21, cf. 36:26) which his prediction of disaster brought upon him at the hands of his fellow countrymen." (Stanley.)

Jeremiah gives his opinion of Jehoiakim in chapter 22. He says; "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness, and his chambers by injustice; that useth his neighbor's service without wages, and giveth him not his hire; that saith, I will build me a wide house and spacious chambers, and cutteth him out windows; and it is ceiled with cedar and painted with vermilion. Shalt thou reign, because thou strivest to excel in cedar? Did not thy father eat and drink, and do justice and righteousness? Then it was

well with him. . . But thine eyes and thy heart are not but for thy covetousness, and for shedding innocent blood, and for oppression and for violence, to do it. Therefore, thus saith Jehovah concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah. They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my brother! or, Ah, sister! They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah Lord! or, Ah his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (vs. 13-19).

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

The incident of this lesson commenced in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, the year that Pharaoh-Neco was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar. It seems, however, to have no connection with that event except as it emphasized the certainty of the calamities predicted by Jeremiah. He received a command to write in a book all the words which he had received from Jehovah since the beginning of his prophetic career, twenty-two years before. This he proceeded to do, and made use of Baruch as his secretary. Jeremiah dictated to Baruch, and the latter copied the prophet's message. When the task was completed Jeremiah, owing to some ceremonial uncleanness, was unable to attend the temple service, so he delegated the task of reading that which had been written to Baruch. On a certain fast day in the ninth month Baruch did this to all the people that were assembled in the temple court. The date at which the reading took place shows that more than nine months at least had been consumed in writing the book. Baruch stood at the new gate, which gave entrance from the

lower and outer court of the temple to the inner and higher one. Nothing is said about the effect of the reading upon the people, but among those who heard it was a certain Micaiah, and he went with the tidings of what was taking place to the officers of the king assembled at that very time in some session. They sent a messenger, one Jehudi, to request Baruch to come and read the roll to them also. On his arrival they requested him to be seated and to read. This he did. The effect on them was just what Jeremiah desired. They turned to one another in fear and told Baruch that this would be repeated to the king. Before taking the document to Jehoiakim, however, they asked Baruch carefully as to the process by which the book was produced. His answer was in accord with the statement of the process made above. These courtiers and officers knew the temper of Jehoiakim, and since they were less unscrupulous and selfish than he, they warned Baruch and Jeremiah through him to conceal themselves before the book was read to the king.

EXPLANATORY.

20. Into the court: That is, the inner court of the palace. From this they would be called later into the chamber of the king. (v. 22). They laid up the roll,

etc.: They were cautious, and, knowing the reckless character of the king, place the roll in safe keeping before going into his presence. The chamber of Elishama:

20 And they went in to the king into the court; but they had laid up the roll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and they told all the words in the ears of the king. 21 So the king sent Jehudi to fetch the roll; and he took it out of the chamber of Elishama the scribe. And Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes that stood beside the king. 22 Now the king was sitting in the winter-house in the

ninth month: and *there was a fire in the brazier burning before him.* 23 And it came to pass, when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, that *the king* cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was in the brazier, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was in the brazier. 24 And they were not afraid, nor rent their garments, neither the king, nor any of his servants that heard all these words. 25 More-

In the court of the temple there were a number of rooms built for the use of priests and officers. This was one of these rooms.

21. Jehudi: The name Jehudi means Jew. According to v. 14 his great-grandfather was Cushi, which denotes an Ethiopian. He was, therefore, not of pure Jewish blood, but, with the zeal which is characteristic of new converts and those recently naturalized, he chose, or there was chosen for him, a name which was calculated to make up for his lack in descent. He was an educated man, for he read the roll to the king. The princes that stood beside the king: Those in attendance on the king.

22. In the winter house: The prophet Amos (1:15) mentions both winter and summer houses. Thomson, in "The Land and the Book" distinguishes between them. "Such language is easily understood by an Oriental. In common parlance the lower apartments are simply *el beih*, the house; the upper is the *alliyeh*, that is, the summer house. Every respectable dwelling has both. If these are on the same story, then the external and airy apartment is the summer house, and that for winter is the interior and more sheltered room. It is rare to meet a family which has an entirely separate dwelling for summer." In the ninth month: The Hebrew year began in the spring. The ninth month was named Chislew (Zech. 7:1) and corresponds to our December.

A fire in the brazier: A depression in the middle of the room, or a fire pan in which charcoals were placed.

23. Three or four leaves: "The substance on which the prophet was to write was parchment. Several skins were stitched together and attached to a roller of wood at one or both ends. The writing was arranged in columns parallel to the rollers, so that as the parchment was gradually unwound from one end to the other, the successive columns could be read." Jehudi had read three or four of these columns when he was stopped by the king. Penknife: A happy translation, for the Hebrew is literally *a scribe's knife*.

24. They were not afraid, etc.: Their conduct compares unfavorably with that of the princes (v. 16); with that of the king's father when the newly discovered book of the law was read to him (2 Kings 22:11); and even with that of Ahab when Elijah proclaimed to him God's message (1 Kings 21:27). "As he threw the torn fragments of the roll on the fire, he threw there in symbol his royal house, his doomed city, the temple, and all the people of the land." (Bib. Com.) Nor any of his servants: These must be distinguished from the princes mentioned in v. 21, for they were impressed by the message of the roll (v. 16). They were personal attendants chosen by the king and were like-minded with himself.

25. Elnathan: One of the princes

over Elnathan and Delaiah and Gemariah had made intercession to the king that he would not burn the roll; but he would not hear them. 26 And the king commanded Jerahmeel the king's son, and Seraiah the son of Azriel, and Shelemiah the son of Abdeel, to take Baruch the scribe and Jeremiah the prophet; but Jehovah hid them.

27 Then the word of Jehovah came to Jeremiah, after that the king had burned the roll, and the words which Baruch wrote at the mouth of Jeremiah, saying, 28 Take thee again another roll, and write in it all the former words that were in the first roll, which Jehoiakim the king of Judah hath burned. 29 And concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah thou shalt say, Thus saith Jehovah: Thou hast burned this roll, saying, Why hast thou written therein, saying, The king of Baby-

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(v. 12). He was sent by Jehoiakim to Egypt to arrest Urijah (26:22). His action here was good, but there it was bad. Gemariah: He was the son of Shaphan, the scribe of Josiah (v. 12). Nothing further is known of Delaiah than that he was son of Shemaiah (v. 12).

26. Jerahmeel the king's son: Jehoiakim was at this time only about twenty-nine years old, so he could not have a grown-up son. Jerahmeel was probably a royal prince, that is one who had a king among his ancestors. Take Baruch, etc.: These men were ordered to arrest Baruch and Jeremiah. Jehovah hid them: This probably means nothing more than that their concealment mentioned in v. 19 was effective.

27, 28. The former task occupied nine months at the very least (vs. 1 and 9). This labor was now to be repeated.

29. Concerning Jehoiakim: This was an addition to the former book. The king of Babylon shall come: It was this

lon shall certainly come and destroy this land, and shall cause to cease from thence man and beast? 30 Therefore thus saith Jehovah concerning Jehoiakim king of Judah: he shall have none to sit upon the thorne of David; and his dead body shall be cast out in the day to the heat, and in the night to the frost. 31 And I will punish him and his seed and his servants for their iniquity; and I will bring upon them, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and upon the men of Judah, all the evil that I have pronounced against them, but they hearkened not. 32 Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah, who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire; and there were added besides unto them many like words.

which stirred the rage of Jehoiakim. These words are found in substance, though not exactly, in 25:9, 10. The king of Babylon had already come, but he was to return and inflict a severer disaster.

30. None to sit upon the throne: When Jehoiakim died his son Jehoiachin commenced to reign, but within three months he was captured by the king of Babylon and carried as a prisoner to the latter's capital (2 Kings 24:12-15). Jeremiah states that Jehoiachin was childless (22:30). So Jehoiakim had no son to sit on David's throne. His dead body shall be cast out: Elsewhere Jeremiah says, "He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem" (22:19). The fulfillment of these two prophecies is not recorded. Probably he was slain in battle and his body was ignominiously dishonored.

31. But they hearkened not: In this

consisted Judah's great sin. It hardened its heart against God's warnings.

32. This new roll contained all that

the first roll contained and much besides. From it probably came our present book of Jeremiah.

COMMENTS.

The Act of Jehoiakim. The character of Jehoiakim was unlike that of any preceding king. There have been some, like Ahab and Manasseh, who were thorough idolaters, but even they were susceptible to warning. There were others, like Joash, who were selfish and ungrateful and grew worse and worse. There were others, like Ahaz, who were impervious to prophetic warnings and censure, but Jehoiakim seems to have combined the faults of all of them. He and his court were thoroughly idolatrous, but it was not idolatry alone which made him scorn the words of Jeremiah. It was deep-seated, unscrupulous selfishness, a determination to have his own way at any cost and in defiance of every man and even God. He did not believe him because it was not convenient for him to believe him. Such a disposition of mind is worse than idolatry. An idolater may be a good man at heart, and when convinced of his errors may reform his ways, but a man of Jehoiakim's disposition is quite beyond the possibility of doing that which Jeremiah demanded of his generation, viz., to "amend its ways and its doings."

The Fate Deserved. "Little did Jehoiakim think what he had done. He had rejected the last opportunity of saving his dynasty and his country. The final offer of mercy had been treated with scorn. But his impotent ungodliness had itself foreshadowed the result. The fragments of the roll as they crackled in the flames were a forecast of the destruction of his house, his city, and his community. Jeremiah received the news of the sacrilege in his hiding place, only to reiterate with greater fullness the contents of his prophecies. The fire had consumed the written letter, but it had risen from the ashes in more awful complete-

ness." This book, more strikingly than the one that had been burned, proclaimed the personal doom of Jehoiakim. This defiance of God and his prophet made it evident that he was himself, and with him the nation, hastening to a deserved doom.

The Word of God Imperishable. "A third time it was recited—this time not by Baruch, but by the courtier Jehudi—to the king as he sat warming himself over the charcoal brazier, with his princes standing round him. Three or four columns exhausted the royal patience. He seized a knife, such as Eastern scribes wear for the sake of erasures, cut the parchment into strips, and threw it into the brazier till it was burnt to ashes. Those who had heard from their fathers of the effect produced on Josiah by the recital of the warnings of Deuteronomy might well be startled at the contrast. None of those well-known signs of astonishment and grief were seen; neither king nor attendants rent their clothes. It was outrage long remembered. Baruch, in his hiding place, was overwhelmed with despair at this failure of his mission. But Jeremiah had now ceased to waver. He bade his timid disciple take up the pen and record once more the terrible messages. The country was doomed. It was only individuals who could be saved. But the divine oracle could not be destroyed in the destruction of its outward framework. It was the new form of the vision of the 'bush burning, but not consumed,' a sacred book, the form in which divine truths were now first beginning to be known, burnt as sacred books have been burnt again and again, in the persecutions of the fourth or of the sixteenth century, yet multiplied by that very cause; springing from the flames to do their

work, living in the voice and life of men, even when their outward letter seemed to be lost. 'Then took Jeremiah another roll, and gave it to Baruch the scribe, the son of Neriah, who wrote therein from the mouth of Jeremiah all the words of the book which Jehoiakim king of Judah had burned in the fire, and there were added besides unto them many like words.' In this record of the prophet's feeling, thus emphasized by his own repetition, is contained the germ of the 'Liberty of Unlicensed Printing,' the inexhaustible vitality of the written word." (Stanley.)

Significance of this Event. "This is the first recorded instance of the formation of a Canonical Book, and of the special purpose of its formation. 'The Book' now, as often afterwards, was to be the death blow of the old regal, aristocratic, sacerdotal exclusiveness, as represented in Jehoiakim. The 'scribe,' now first rising into importance in the person of Baruch, to supply the defects of the living prophet, was as the printing-press, in far later ages, supplying the defects both of prophet and scribe, and handing on the words of truth which else might have irretrievably perished." (Stanley.)

THE LESSON STORY.

Of Josiah's four sons none were more wicked than Jehoiakim. He not only did wickedly, but hardened himself against all the prophet's rebukes and warnings. Jeremiah contrasts his cruel oppression and selfish luxury with Josiah's just and generous treatment of the poor. (Jer. 22:13-17.)

To the sin of oppressing the poor was added the crime of persecuting the prophets. The blood of the martyr-prophet Urijah had been shed by this son of "Judah's most pious king," and Jeremiah himself narrowly escaped martyrdom.

The first year of Jehoiakim's reign was made memorable by the invasion of Nebuchadnezzar, the greatest of the Babylonian kings. After a brief siege Jerusalem was taken, and Jehoiakim dethroned, with a view to carrying him away captive, but for some reason he was restored to his throne as a vassal. For a while he remained loyal to Nebuchadnezzar, but finally rebelled, although warned against the sin and danger by both Jeremiah and Ezekiel. When too late he saw his mistake, and tried, by proclaiming a fast and a day of humiliation in the temple, to escape disaster. Jeremiah seized this opportunity to make another appeal to the

hardened king. As he could not go in person, he dictated to Baruch, his scribe, all the words he would speak to Jehoiakim and directed him to write them down. It must have been a strenuous task, for the "roll" was to convey all of the prophet's warnings from the beginning of his call till then. A still more trying duty awaited the scribe, and one from which he would gladly have excused himself, yet encouraged by the prophet's words, he undertook it bravely. Baruch was to take the written message and read it in the temple to the people. Micaiah was so much impressed with the prophet's solemn warnings that he went out quickly to tell his father, Gemariah, and the princes. They sent immediately for Baruch, and listened to the reading in great fear and trembling. When he had finished they said, "We must tell the king." Remembering the sad fate of Urijah, the princes then urged Baruch to lose no time in securing a place of safety for himself and Jeremiah, but these faithful servants were safe from the king's wrath, for "the Lord hid them." The princes, laying aside the sacred "roll" in the scribe's room, went without delay to tell the king. It was a chilly day, and Jehoiakim sat in his win-

ter-chamber warming himself before the fire. He called on one of his servants, Jehudi, to read the prophet's words, and listened with anger and contempt. Then, without waiting to hear them all, he snatched the writing from Jehudi's hands, and cutting it up with his knife, threw the fragments into the fire. But although he had burned the writing, it was impossible for him to destroy the message. Soon were reproduced the woe-

ful prophecies with others added, still more terrible.

Finally the doom fell in the coming of Nebuchadnezzar. Jehoiakim, with many more, was carried away to Babylon. No account is given of his death, the writer only saying that "he slept with his fathers."

Thus the king perished and was forgotten, but the word of the prophet was indestructible.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What did the Lord command Jeremiah to say in the court of the temple?

2. What reason did Jehovah assign for his commandment?

3. What evils especially were the people of Judah prone to commit?

4. Why and how should preachers and teachers be diligent to speak the Word?

5. Name some reasons why, in your judgment, wicked men oppose the truth.

6. What are some present methods of showing hatred for those who speak the truth?

7. What relation should the church sustain to the truth necessary to salvation?

8. What should be the attitude of all toward the church, its worship and work?

9. What should be the character of preaching and teaching, with reference to the errors, sins and important needs of the people?

10. Illustrate, if you can, how Christ applied vital truth to vital, practical needs.

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. What was Jeremiah told to do in the fourth year of Jehoiakim? Jer. 36:1, 2.

2. Why do you suppose he was told to write all the words *against* and none *in praise* of Israel and Judah? Jer. 36:2.

3. What was the Lord's reason for presenting all these words? Jer. 36:3.

4. What two things were named as necessary to Israel's forgiveness? Jer. 36:3.

5. What two important tasks were laid by Jeremiah upon Baruch? Jer. 36:4-6.

6. Why was Baruch, instead of Jeremiah, to read to the people? Jer. 36:5.

7. To how many of the people were the words of the prophet to be read? Jer. 36:6.

8. What was the reason Jehovah gave for having the words read to the people? Jer. 36:7.

9. What indication have we here of God's patience with his people? Jer. 36:7.

10. What particularly favorable occasion did Baruch choose for the reading of the words of Jeremiah? Jer. 36:9, 10.

11. Where did Micaiah go and what did he do after he had heard the words of Jehovah read by Baruch? Jer. 36:11-13.

12. What message did the princes send to Baruch by Jehudi and what the response? Jer. 36:14.

13. What further request did they make of Baruch? Jer. 36:15.

14. What two things were then immediately done by the princes? Jer. 36:16.

15. What special inquiry did they then make of Baruch, and what was his answer? Jer. 36:17, 18.

16. What advice did they give to Baruch, including Jeremiah? Jer. 36:19.

17. Where was the roll taken and to whom read by Jehudi? Jer. 36:20, 21.

18. What two things did the king do with the roll after hearing only a little of its message read to him and the princes? Jer. 36:22, 23.

19. What marks of insensibility and moral blindness on the part of the king and his servants are mentioned by the prophet? Jer. 36:24.

20. What did the king order to be done with Jeremiah and Baruch, and what part did the Lord himself perform in their behalf? Jer. 36:26.

21. How was the word of Jehovah, in the burnt scroll, restored and increased? Jer. 36:28-32.

22. Name one reason why the roll was so repugnant to king Jehoiakim? Jer. 36:29.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. The most impressive and ever-recurring lesson in these Old Testament studies is God's desire to lead nations, kings and peoples to repentance. In the light of the New Testament we can understand far better the goodness of God leading men to repentance, than we can understand it in the light of the Old. Sin is God's enemy, because it injures or destroys his children. It would be appropriate to pause in every lesson long enough to emphasize the iniquity of iniquity, the evil of evil and the heinousness and terrible sinfulness of sin. It has caused God infinite sorrow. It has blighted health, corrupted youth, destroyed beauty, undermined intelligence, turned friends into foes, hope into despair and paradise into a howling wilderness. The Bible is a book on sin and its consequences; on God and his cure for all sin. It is a medical book, a surgical book, a redemptive book. It tells of the Infinite Father, his love of his children—Jews and Gentiles, of all, both near and far away—and seeks to

win all human hearts back to sanity, seriousness, life and safety. We, learning from the example of Jesus, should seek daily to lead men to repentance and to life.

2. We are again impressed in this lesson with the irreconcilable antipathy between the spirit of the world and the spirit of the Father. "The carnal mind is enmity against God. It is not subject to the law of God. Neither indeed can be." The world must be subdued and overcome. Parley and compromise will not avail. "If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him." "The friend of the world is the enemy of God." We may mistake the real meaning of worldliness. It may be identified with certain amusements, pursuits, customs of society, regard for favors and opinions of others; but worldliness consists in a certain spirit which may be defined as the exact opposite of the spirit of Christ. It may be found in the temple and in the profession of godliness. Shun it as a deadly serpent.

JEREMIAH CAST INTO PRISON.

Jeremiah 37. (Print vs. 4-21.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. Matt. 5:11.

Memory Verse—15. **Time**—588-6 B. C. **Persons**—Jeremiah. Zedekiah, Irijah, Jonathan and the Chaldean army. **Places**—The Benjamin Gate and the Bakers' street.

DAILY READINGS.

- Aug. 14.... M—Jer. 37:1-21—Jeremiah Cast into Prison.
 Aug. 15.... T—Jer. 38:1-13—Jeremiah Let Down Into the Miry Dungeon.
 Aug. 16.... W—Jer. 38:14-28—The King's Secret Counsel.
 Aug. 17.... T—2 Chron. 36:11-21—They Mocked God's Messengers.
 Aug. 18.... F—Heb. 11:32-40—The Heroes of Faith.
 Aug. 19.... S—2 Tim. 4:1-18—"I Have Fought the Good Fight."
 Aug. 20.... S—Rev. 2:8-11—"Be Thou Faithful Unto Death."

TOPOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

There was a Benjamin gate to the temple court (Jer. 20:2) as well as to the city. The one referred to in 38:7 may have been the gate of the temple, since the sessions of the court were held in the temple gates (Jer. 26:10). Both of these gates received their names from the fact that men going from the city or temple grounds into the territory of Benjamin would pass through them. They were on the north, or more probably the northeast side. Jeremiah, when going to the land of Benjamin, was probably going

to his early home, Anathoth. He had removed from that village to Jerusalem many years before, but at exactly what time is not known. In oriental cities workmen of the same craft congregate together in plying their trade. Hence a street was named from the craft of those who live or toil in it. Mention is made in this chapter of the Baker's street. Jeremiah alludes to other workmen (6:29, 10:9, 14; 18:2, 24:1), who would likewise have streets or sections set aside for their work.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

The entire period of Jehoiakim's reign was for Jeremiah a time of conflict and trial. At length this reign came to an end and "Jehoiakim was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin, a youth aged eighteen years, in whose government the queen-mother Nehusta, to judge from the prominence given her (Jer. 13:18; cf. 22:26, 29:2), seems to have exercised considerable influence. His reign was a brief one. The penalty for Jehoiakim's imprudence fell upon his son. Jerusalem

was besieged by Nebuchadnezzar; and after three months' reign the king 'went out,' (2 Kings 24:12), that is, surrendered to the enemy: he himself, the queen-mother Nehusta, the principal members of the court, and the *elite* of Jerusalem generally, were exiled to Babylonia. Seven thousand men of war, 1,000 artisans, besides, presumably, women and children, are mentioned as the number of those who thus went into captivity (2 Kings 24:16). Only the poorest of the people

4 Now Jeremiah came in and went out among the people; for they had not put him into prison. 5 And Pharaoh's army was come forth out of Egypt; and when

the Chaldeans that were besieging Jerusalem heard tidings of them, they brake up from Jerusalem.

were left behind. The temple was at the same time despoiled of many of its golden vessels, and the palace of its treasures. . . . Zedekiah, Josiah's oldest son, and Jehoiachin's uncle, having sworn a solemn oath of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar (Ezra 17:11-18), was appointed by him king over the Jews still remaining in Jerusalem and Judah. Jeremiah's tone now changes; the prophecies belonging to the reign of Zedekiah display no conflict of feeling; the prophet no longer intercedes for his people; he gives Zedekiah no hope; he is bent solely on inducing the king to submit to the Chaldeans. As all the leading men were now in exile, there must have been many among those left in Jerusalem who hitherto had occupied a humble station in life, but who now found themselves called on to fill state office. These, in many cases, were elated by their new dignities, and, proud of the confidence placed in them by Nebuchadnezzar, they treated their brethren in exile with no small contempt, declaring loudly that the 'land was given to them to possess it' (Ez. 11:15, 33:24). Jeremiah expressed unambiguously his own very different judgment on both those left in Jerusalem and on the exiles (chap. 24). Like Ezekiel (11:16-21, 12), he gave up the former entirely, and planted his hope for the future exclu-

sively on the latter. There were many, however, who refused to believe that the exile would last long. . . . To all of these Jeremiah gave the same answer, it was God's purpose to give the Chaldeans the rule over Western Asia for seventy years; and till those seventy years were expired, it was useless to think either of any return of the exiles, or of the restoration of the sacred vessels. . . . After seven or eight years, however, Zedekiah compromised himself by treasonable negotiations with Pharaoh Hophra; and in the ninth year (588 B. C.) the second siege of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans began. Zedekiah sends anxiously to inquire of Jeremiah the issue of the siege; he replies unambiguously that the besiegers will prevail, and that the only hope of safety is to submit to the Chaldeans" (21:1-10; cf. 34:1-7). (Driver).

The story related in this lesson is an incident in this siege. After the siege began Zedekiah sent to Jeremiah and requested his prayers on behalf of the inhabitants of the beleaguered city. That Jeremiah refused this request may be easily inferred, though it is not stated. The Chaldeans temporarily withdrew on account of the approach of an Egyptian army. During this interval in the siege the incident of the lesson occurred.

EXPLANATORY.

4. **Jeremiah came in and went out:** He was still free and exercised the privileges of a free man. They had not put him into prison: His arrest and imprisonment, which are described in this lesson, had not yet taken place (v. 15). Jeremiah suffered still another imprisonment,

but the one described in this lesson is referred to.

5. **Pharaoh's army:** This army was sent by Pharaoh Hophra (Jer. 44:30). He is called Apries by Herodotus. He was not an able nor popular ruler, and was unable to cope with so skillful a general

6 Then came the word of Jehovah unto the prophet Jeremiah, saying, 7 Thus saith Jehovah, the God of Israel, Thus shall ye say to the King of Judah, that sent you unto me to inquire of me: Behold, Pharaoh's army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt into their own land. 8 And the Chaldeans shall come again, and fight against this city; and they shall take it, and burn it with fire. 9 Thus saith Jehovah, Deceive not yourselves, saying, The Chaldeans shall surely depart from us; for they shall not depart. 10 For though ye had smitten the whole army of the Chal-

deans that fight against you, and there remained but wounded men among them, yet would they rise up every man in his tent, and burn this city with fire.

11 And it came to pass that, when the army of the Chaldeans was broken up from Jerusalem for fear of Pharaoh's army, 12 then Jeremiah went forth out of Jerusalem to go into the land of Benjamin, to receive his portion there, in the midst of the people. 13 And when he was in the gate of Benjamin, a captain of the ward was there, whose name was Irijah, the son of Shelemiah, the son of Hananiah; and he laid hold on Jere-

as Nebuchadnezzar. They broke up from Jerusalem: They discontinued their siege and withdrew.

7. Thus shall ye say to the king: This prophetic oracle was addressed to Zedekiah, who had sent Jehucal to Jeremiah to request his prayers. It is evident, therefore, that Zedekiah did not fully share in the false hopes of his people. Shall return to Egypt: It is not said whether the Egyptian army suffered defeat or fled without risking battle. The latter seems to be the more reasonable inference from this language.

8. The Chaldeans shall come again: Jeremiah sketches the fate of the city, and in doing so he leaves no possible grounds for hope.

9. Deceive not yourselves: The sudden withdrawal of the besieging army had filled the breasts of Jerusalem's population with hope. They felt confident that it would suffer defeat at the hands of the Egyptian army, and so could not return to renew the siege. Jeremiah, however, affirms that this is not a permanent withdrawal.

10. Though ye had smitten the whole army: So confident is Jeremiah that it is God's purpose that Jerusalem is to be overthrown, that he affirms that even though but a few of the Chaldeans re-

mained, and these should all be severely wounded (thrust through), they would be more than a match for the Jews. Burn this city with fire: The prophet is always explicit in his statement that the city shall suffer destruction by fire. (Cf. vs. 8, 34:2.)

11. This verse begins the account of another incident that occurred during the lull in the siege.

12. Into the land of Benjamin: Probably to Anathoth, his former home, which was in the territory of Benjamin. To receive his portion: That is, to receive an inheritance. Some property located in Benjamin was due him, and the uncertainty of the future would make him anxious to take formal possession of it. In the midst of the people: There was a great rush of people to get out of the city on account of the close confinement in which the people had been kept and also on account of the great scarcity of food. Many were going out in search of something to eat, and the prophet was in the midst of the throng.

13. The gate of Benjamin: (See Topographical Notes.) It is probably the same as the Ephraim gate, for Ephraim was north from Benjamin. A captain of the ward: A sentinel. Thou art falling away to the Chaldeans: That is, desert-

miah the prophet, saying, Thou art falling away to the Chaldeans. 14 Then said Jeremiah, It is false; I am not falling away to the Chaldeans. But he hearkened not to him; so Irijah laid hold on Jeremiah, and brought him to the princes. 15 And the princes were wroth with Jeremiah and smote him, and put him in prison in the house of Jonathan the scribe; for they had made that the prison.

16 When Jeremiah was come into the dungeon-house, and into the cells, and Jeremiah had remained there many days; 17 then Zedekiah the king sent, and fetched him: and the king asked him secretly in his house, and said, Is there any

word from Jehovah? And Jeremiah said, There is. He said also, Thou shalt be delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon. 18 Moreover Jeremiah said unto king Zedekiah, Wherein have I sinned against thee, or against thy servants, or against this people, that ye have put me in prison? 19 Where now are your prophets that prophesied unto you, saying, The king of Babylon shall not come against you, nor against this land? 20 And now hear, I pray thee, O my lord the king: let my supplication, I pray thee, be presented before thee, that thou cause me not to return to the house of Jonathan the scribe, lest I die there.

ing. Just before the siege commenced Jeremiah had said, "He that abideth in the city shall die by the sword, and by the famine and by the pestilence; but he that goeth out and falleth to the Chaldeans that besiege you, he shall live (21:9). Such language would give natural grounds for the belief that he was deserting.

14. Jeremiah had nothing but his own word to prove that he was not deserting, so he was arrested and taken before the princes.

15. The princes were wroth: Jeremiah had no way to prove that desertion was not his intention except his word, and the princes were too bitterly opposed to him to accept that. These were not the same princes who, on the occasion of his arrest and trial at the beginning of Jehoiakim's reign, had favored him (Cf. 26). They were now in exile and more unworthy ones occupied their places. Jonathan the scribe: He was the successor of Shaphan in this office. The latter was either dead or in exile. They had made that the prison: Probably the house of Jonathan was a building in the temple court, and some excavation underneath was used as the dun-

geon. "The whole of the plateau on which the temple and palace stood is honeycombed underneath with works of various kinds."

16. Dungeon house: Literally, house of the pit. It was some underground chamber. Many days: Sufficient time for the Chaldeans to return and renew the siege.

17. Asked him secretly: Zedekiah was completely under the dominance of his wicked court. He was a weak man and was afraid to act in the way that seemed to him to be right. Thou shalt be delivered, etc.: This agrees with the declarations which Jeremiah made at other times (32:3, 4; 34:2, 3).

18. It would seem that this was Jeremiah's first opportunity to bring his complaint before the king.

19. Your prophets: The false prophets. Jeremiah is using the plural and is really speaking to the people, though addressing the king. He points out the present circumstances as proof of the prophets' falseness.

20. Lest I die there: It is almost certain from the reference in v. 16 to the house of the pit, that Jeremiah was kept

21 Then Zedekiah the king commanded, and they committed Jeremiah into the court of the guard; and they gave him daily a loaf of bread out of the bakers'

street, until all the bread in the city was spent. Thus Jeremiah remained in the court of the guard.

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underground, where ventilation and light were poor. Such a place of concealment would imperil his life.

21. The court of the guard: "A part of the court surrounding the palace railed off to guard prisoners in, whom it was not desired to throw into the common dungeon; their friends had free access to them, but they might not pass beyond

the area in which they were confined." A loaf of bread: A round cake of bread. It seems from Luke 11:5 that three were required for a meal for one person. One would then be scarcely enough to sustain life. Until all the bread . . . was spent: Which was in the ninth day, the fourth month of the eleventh year of Zedekiah (52:6).

COMMENTS.

The Character of Zedekiah. Many of the circumstances of Jeremiah's life were shaped and ordered by the character of the king who occupied the throne. This was notably the case during the reign of Zedekiah, and no incident makes this more evident than the one which constitutes this lesson. With the removal to Babylon of Jehoiachin went the flower of the Judean people. All of those who had been trained under Josiah were gone, and there remained only those who had taken their ideals from Jehoiakim and his times. They were masterful in wickedness and uncompromising in their opposition to the worship of Jehovah. Zedekiah became the tool of this faction. It is certain that he had a higher ideal, but he was too much of a weakling to stand against the princes of his realm. "He was well-meaning, but weak." He had no zeal for the service of Jehovah, and yet in times of dire straits he looks to Jehovah, and even consults his prophet. He was vacillating in character. He took a solemn oath of allegiance to the Chaldean power, and yet was tempted and induced to violate his oath and to enter

into negotiations with Egypt. He does throw some protection around Jeremiah, but dares not openly to consult him, so completely was he under the control of stronger wills among his servants. It was this weakness of the king which made Jeremiah's life such an unhappy one during this period. The prophet was hated and persecuted by the vain and arrogant upstart princes, and over them Zedekiah could exercise no restraint.

Jeremiah's Patriotism. The question as to what constitutes true patriotism arises again in studying the conduct and the preaching of Jeremiah. He repeatedly affirmed that the Chaldeans should prevail, and that safety was to be secured only by submission to them. He encouraged individuals to withdraw from Jerusalem and place themselves in the hands of the enemy. In the city his influence was exerted to weaken and divide the strength of his countrymen. Such conduct has always been regarded as treason, and beyond question there were many of his countrymen who regarded his conduct as unpatriotic. Looked at in this way, it is not strange that he was watched with suspicion and was arrested for what

many probably believed sincerely to be an effort to join the enemy. But Jeremiah's conduct was not in reality unpatriotic. When Nebuchadnezzar defeated Pharaoh at the battle of Carchemish, Jeremiah at once proclaimed that he was destined to achieve success and rule over Western Asia. Such was God's purpose. To resist it was to resist God and hazard national destruction. Hence it would

spised the service of Jehovah. They were without principle and hopelessly corrupt. An incident which took place during the siege, and is therefore coincident in time with the events of this lesson, illustrates their character. When the siege commenced the weak king, Zedekiah, agitated for reform. The wealthier class had enslaved some of the poorer Hebrews, and were holding them in viola-



GROTTO OF JEREMIAH.

have been better for the nation to submit, and this, with the courage of his convictions, Jeremiah proclaimed. Time did not change his attitude. Jeremiah, though performing a part which seemed to be unpatriotic, was in truth intensely zealous for his nation and in the truest sense was patriotic.

The Character of the People. Reference has been made to the fact that the best part of the people had been removed to Babylon before the reign of Zedekiah began. Those who were left were a sorry lot. They were "naughty figs, which could not be eaten, they were so bad." They were idolatrous and de-

tion of the law which forbade permanent enslavement of the Hebrews. Frightened by the threatened disaster, the slaveholders consented, and released their bondservants and entered into a sacred covenant to that effect. When the lull in the siege came and the Chaldeans withdrew, they disowned their vow and again enslaved their brethren. This was the character of the people among whom Jeremiah wrought, and it is not surprising that he failed.

The Martyrdom of Jeremiah. The Christian martyrs have been a priceless heritage of the church. The same constancy and devotion were manifested by

the prophet Jeremiah. In his case, however, he suffered martyrdom at the hands of his own people. He was oppressed and mistreated. He was cast into prison and made to suffer hardship, yet his conviction was never shaken. He com-

plained of his mistreatment and wept bitterly, but he remained true. He probably felt that his life was an utter failure, but probably many a soul was strengthened by his constancy and devotion.

THE LESSON STORY.

Jeremiah was the greatest prophet of the period immediately preceding the Captivity. His life was a long continued martyrdom. In him it seemed that the persecutions of the prophets reached their climax; yet through them all he never ceased to warn the king and people of threatened doom, nor to point them to the only way of safety. At the time of our lesson Zedekiah, the oldest of Josiah's sons, and the last of Judah's kings, was reigning, as vassal to Nebuchadnezzar. Many hundreds of Judah, the very flower of the nation, had been carried into captivity, the temple plundered, and the whole land made desolate. The hopes of the prophet were no longer centered in the remnant that remained, but rather in the exiled. Already he looked to the time when, after seventy years of captivity Judah, chastened and purified, should return with joy to Zion.

Zedekiah was as weak as Jehoiakim had been wicked. Although pledged to be true in his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar, he was beguiled through the princes and false prophets into rebellion. In spite of his solemn oath and Jeremiah's warnings, he sought help from Egypt to support him in his rebellion. The relief afforded was only temporary, for soon the Chaldeans again besieged Jerusalem. In this time of distress and danger Jeremiah's prayers were sought on behalf of the city. How different had

been the message sent to Isaiah from Hezekiah, and the answer! Jeremiah had no word of hope for the king. He answered him that the Chaldeans should be victorious. This prophecy of evil must have caused deep disaffection among the people, for as Jeremiah was leaving the city to visit his old home at Anathoth, he was arrested at the gate by Irijah upon a charge of treason. They accused him of intending to desert to the Chaldeans, and although the charge was bitterly denied by the prophet, he was thrust into prison, in the house of Jonathan the scribe. Here, in the vault of this "house of the pit," he remained for many days. The king longed to give him freedom, but feared to offend the princes who hated Jeremiah. Jerusalem was being besieged, and the king, eager for some assurance of comfort, secretly sent to the prophet to inquire if there was "any word from the Lord." Jeremiah's answer was direct and fearless, "Yes." The king should be "delivered into the hand of the king of Babylon." The prophet then questioned why he had been imprisoned? Had he not prophesied truly? And if so, ought not the king to deliver him? Although weak, Zedekiah was not cruel; so, in spite of his fear of the princes, he heeded Jeremiah's request to the extent of so mitigating his sufferings that he was allowed to stay in the court of the guard and be supplied with bread every day as long as there was any in the city.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What was Jeremiah told to do with the words of Jehovah?
2. What important service did Baruch perform in the premises?
3. What effect did the message read by Baruch have upon the princes?
4. Why do you suppose Jehudi, rather than Baruch, read the words to the king?
5. What wholesome advice did the princes give to Baruch about himself and Jeremiah?
6. What did King Jehoiakim do with the first roll, and why?
7. What expression of astonishment is found in Jer. 36:24?
8. What substitute for the burnt roll was duly provided, and by whom?

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. Who reigned in Judah instead of Jehoiakim's son? Jer. 37:1.
2. What is said as to his hearkening or not hearkening to Jeremiah? Jer. 37:2.
3. What request did the king make through his two servants of Jeremiah? Jer. 37:3.
4. What is said of Jeremiah's liberty at this time? Jer. 37:4.
5. What broke the siege of Jerusalem by the Chaldeans? Jer. 37:5.
6. What news did the Lord grant, through Jeremiah, to king Zedekiah? Jer. 37:6-10.
7. Where did Jeremiah endeavor to go after the Chaldean army had broken up from Jerusalem, and why did he endeavor to go? Jer. 37:12.
8. When the prophet was in the gate of Benjamin what was done and what was said by Irijah? Jer. 37:13.
9. What response did the prophet make to the charge of Irijah? Jer. 37:14.
10. What was then done unto Jeremiah by the princes, and why? Jer. 37:15.
11. After the prophet had spent many days in the dungeon-house who sent for him, and why? Jer. 37:16, 17.
12. What was Jeremiah's message about Babylon, and what request did he make of the king? Jer. 37:17-20.
13. What two questions did Jeremiah ask king Zedekiah? Jer. 37:18, 19.
14. Why did Jeremiah make supplication not to return to the house of Jonathan? Jer. 37:20.
15. What effect did the appeal have upon the king, and what the result? Jer. 37:21.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. Jesus, in his Sermon on the Mount, said: "Every one that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them not, shall be likened unto a foolish man, who built his house upon the sand." The foolishness of not doing the will of God was plainly shown in the conduct and example of many a king of Judah and of Israel. The captivity in Babylon was the outward harvest of rebellion against God. "Whatsoever things were written afore-

time were written for our instruction."

2. The same lesson which we have emphasized is again impressed upon us here. Jeremiah, a true, brave prophet, must suffer in the name of the Lord. He was hated because he would not prophesy smooth things to the kings and the princes. He told them faithfully their faults and what would be the certain consequences of their wickedness. They hated to hear his words. He could not be daunted. The church and its teachers should

so speak the needed, pointed word against sin, and against the folly and guilt of those who practice it, that the wicked shall see their madness and threatened overthrow and shall repent. Every age and every generation, every community and every individual, needs its faithful, courageous, suffering prophets. Note the fitting words of our Golden Text: "Blessed are ye when men shall revile you." Let the church take up its cross once more to follow the Master and his apostles, as well as his grand old prophets. No room any more for heroism? No call any more to "suffer" with Christ? If not, then I fear there is no opportunity any more to be glorified (Rom. 8:17).

3. But there is abundant opportunity—through the lips and through the pen; by faithful example, courageous living, outspokenness against errors, wicked customs, not only in the world outside the Church, but in it and among its worldly members, its selfish, ease-loving, indiffer-

ent, self-deceived adherents. There is room for tremendous work; for munificent gifts and sacrifices. There is room for example, for shepherding, for self-denial and for love—even the love that suffers long and is kind. Don't think that all need for suffering in the name of Christ is past. There never has been a day when heroic, Christ-like willingness to suffer for the glory of God was more necessary or capable of more and richer fruit than is this day in which we live!

More time is needed from daily business to go about doing good. More rectitude is needed in business; more of the spirit of Christ is needed about the prosecution and extension of business; more dominion of Christ over business is demanded to-day. Why should the kingdom of Judah be ruled in the fear of God any more than one's daily life and conduct? There is a dominion to which every Christian is called. Let each see to it that no one takes his crown.

JUDAH CARRIED CAPTIVE TO BABYLON.

Jeremiah 39. (Print 1-10.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Be sure your sin will find you out. Num. 32:23.

Memory Verses—9, 10. **Suggested Readings**—2 Kings 25; 2 Chron. 36.
Time—586 B. C. **Persons**—Nebuchadrezzar, Zedekiah, Nebuzaradan, officers of Nebuchadrezzar. **Places**—Jerusalem and Riblah.

DAILY READINGS.

Aug. 21.... M—Jer. 39:1-18—Judah Carried Captive to Babylon.
 Aug. 22.... T—Jer. 52:1-16—The City and King Captured.
 Aug. 23.... W—Jer. 52:17-23; 2 Kings 25:13-17—The Temple Despoiled.
 Aug. 24.... T—2 Kings 25:22-26—Wicked People Left in the Land.
 Aug. 25.... F—Ezek. 12:1-20—Ezekiel's Prediction of the King's Capture.
 Aug. 26.... S—Lam. 2:1-10—The Lord hath Cast Down the Beauty of Israel.
 Aug. 27.... S—Lam. 4:1-16—The Horrors of the Siege.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

The narrative of the capture of Jerusalem introduces a number of local features of the city. We are not able to locate these with any precision, though their mention helps to form a picture of the city before its first destruction. Those places mentioned in this lesson are the king's garden; the middle gate and the gate between the walls.

Riblah was the place where Pharaoh-Neco proceeded after the battle of Char-

chemish and summoned Jehoahaz to appear before him (1 Kings 23:33). From its use by the king of Egypt, and later by the king of Babylon, it was evidently centrally located and on the road from Babylon to Palestine. "It has been discovered in modern times, and retains its name. It lies on the banks of a mountain stream, in the midst of a vast and fertile plain, yielding the most abundant supplies of forage." (Robinson.)

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

The siege lasted eighteen months, lacking one day. After the interruption which was earlier described, "the Babylonians returned, and the siege was held closer than before. Jeremiah appears to have got his release, but was a second time imprisoned, without doubt on the charge of weakening the men of war by persisting in his call to surrender. They cast him into a cistern in the house of Malchijah, from the mire of which he was drawn by Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian, and placed in the court of the guard, where the king again consulted him. It is uncertain

whether it was during his first or this second imprisonment that, confident as ever of the fall of the city, he pledged his hope for the future of the nation by purchasing from his uncle the field in Anathoth. But though Jerusalem should be burnt, he predicted its rebuilding and its restoration as a center of worship. The form in which the latter prediction is put is very significant. For a day shall be when the watchers call

"Upon Mount Ephraim
 Rise, let us go up to Sion,
 To Jehovah our God."

1 And it came to pass when Jerusalem was taken (in the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month, came Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon and all his army against Jerusalem, and besieged it; 2 in the eleventh year of Zede-

kiah, in the fourth month, the ninth day of the month, a breach was made in the city), 3 that all the princes of the king of Babylon came in, and sat in the middle gate, *to wit*, Nergal-sharezer, Samgar-nebo, Sarsechim, Rab-saris, Nergal-sha-

That is to say, Jeremiah was not only confident of the resumption of worship in the temple, but he conceived of the national worship as centralized there, in obedience to the Deuteronomic Law.

"The end was not far off. The timid, those who in their despair felt that Jehovah had forsaken the city, and those who had before deserted him for the Babylonian gods, went over to the enemy. Famine ensued, and pestilence. The enemy pressed, as every besieger before and after them did, upon the northern wall, where the ground was level, and their engines were not confronted as on other sides by high rocks. At last, on the ninth day of the fourth month of the

eleventh year of Zedekiah, July 586, a breach was made. As the Chaldeans were thus about to enter on the north, the king and his guards fled by the gate in the southeast corner of the city through the royal gardens, toward the Jordan. They had better have sought the desert of Judah. They were pursued, captured and taken to Riblah where, after his sons were slain before him, the last king of Judah had his eyes put out and was carried to Babylon. The Chaldeans burned the temple, the palace, and many of the other houses. The walls were ruined. And the most of the population were carried away to Babylon." (Geo. A. Smith.)

EXPLANATORY.

1. In the ninth year of Zedekiah: This verse gives the date of the beginning of the siege. This same date is given in 2 Kings 25:1; Jer. 52:4. The date is evidently inserted here to explain how it was that "Jerusalem was taken" (38:28). The division between the thirty-eighth and thirty-ninth chapters was not well chosen (see Revised Version). The passage in Kings tells us that the siege commenced on the tenth day of the tenth month. Ezekiel, who lived among the captives in Babylon, proclaimed the day on which the siege commenced (Ez. 24:12). **Nebuchadrezzar:** His name is printed in two forms, the one given here, and Nebuchadnezzar. They were different ways of reproducing in Hebrew the Chaldean original which Streane says in English sounds Nabokudurri-uzur. **Came Nebuchadrezzar.**

The king of Babylon did not himself come in person to Jerusalem, for according to v. 5 he was at Riblah.

2. In the eleventh year of Zedekiah: According to the date given here the siege lacked but one day of lasting eighteen months. The great natural strength of the city enabled it to hold out this long time. It was interrupted once by an approach of an Egyptian army, and this, together with the fact that the Babylonian troops were at the same time besieging Lachish and Azekah (Jer. 34:7), tended to prolong the siege. **A breach was made:** Jer. 52:6 states that on this day the bread failed. There is no conflict between the two statements, for the food would speedily break down the defense.

3. Though we have three other accounts of the capture of Jerusalem, viz.,

rezer, Rab-mag, with all the rest of the princes of the king of Babylon.

4 And it came to pass that, when Zedekiah the king of Judah and all the men of war saw them, then they fled, and went forth out of the city by night, by the way of the king's garden, through the gate betwixt the two walls; and he went out toward the Arabah. 5 But the army of the Chaldeans pursued after them, and

overtook Zedekiah in the plains of Jericho: and when they had taken him, they brought him up to Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon to Riblah in the land of Hamath; and he gave judgment upon him. 6 Then the king of Babylon slew the sons of Zedekiah in Riblah before his eyes; also the king of Babylon slew all the nobles of Judah. 7 Moreover he put out Zedekiah's eyes, and bound him in fet-

2 Kings 25; 2 Chron. 36 and Jer. 52, the information contained in this verse is found in this narrative only. **The middle gate:** This gate is not mentioned elsewhere. It was probably in the northern wall. Nergal-sharezar, etc.: . . . These are the names of the officers in command at the time Jerusalem was captured. Two of these names are titles of officers, viz., Rabsaris and Rabmag, and the other four are names. There are probably, then, only four princes mentioned.

4. **Saw them:** This was the signal that resistance any longer was futile. Only part of the city had been captured. If, as is possible, the breach was made in the north wall, then only the western half of the city was in the hands of the Babylonians while the stronghold on the eastern hill was still under the control of Zedekiah. Such a condition could not long remain. The armies rested during the night, and the next day would place the Babylonians in full control. Hence Zedekiah fled, for he could expect no mercy from Nebuchadrezzar, since he had broken his oath. **Went forth . . . by night:** The breach was probably made near nightfall, and the Chaldeans made no effort to penetrate farther than the middle gate till morning. Ezekiel foretold that the flight should be by night. (12:12). **By the way of the king's garden:** Whether these were outside or inside of the walls is not known. They were probably southeast of the city,

below the present pool of Siloam. The king's flight was in this direction. **Through the gate between the two walls:** The two walls were the ones on the west side of the east hill and the east side of the west hill. Instead of building across the Tyropean valley the walls extended up on either side. **Toward the Arabah:** The valley of the Jordan River. He fled down the Kedron. His aim evidently was to escape to the eastern side of the Jordan.

5. **In the plains of Jericho:** Zedekiah marched a considerable distance before he was overtaken.

6. **He gave judgment upon him:** Sec-Kings 25:6 has "they gave," etc. The meaning is that Zedekiah was tried and a decision reached.

6, 7. These two verses itemize the penalty which it was decreed Zedekiah was to suffer. There were five items in this punishment: (1) His sons were slain before his eyes, (2) all the nobles of Judah were slain, (3) his eyes were put out, (4) he was bound in fetters, and (5) he was removed to Babylon. The third of these items reconciles two apparently conflicting statements made by prophets. Jeremiah said that Zedekiah shall "speak with the king of Babylon mouth to mouth, and his eyes shall behold his eyes" (32:4). Ezekiel, on the other hand, said that "he shall be brought to Babylon, and shall not see it though he die there." (12:13.)

ters, to carry him to Babylon. 8 And the Chaldeans burned the king's house, and the houses of the people, with fire, and brake down the walls of Jerusalem. 9 Then Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried away captive into Babylon the residue of the people that remained

in the city, the deserters also that fell away to him, and the residue of the people that remained. 10 But Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard left of the poor of the people, that had nothing, in the land of Judah, and gave them vineyards and fields at the same time.

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8. **Burned the king's house.** If we had this narrative alone we should naturally suppose that this took place at once, but Jer. 52:12 and 2 Kings 25:8 expressly state that this was a month after the capture of the city. The fate of the city was submitted to Nebuchadnezzar, and he decided for its destruction.

9. **Nebuzaradan:** This narrative does not afford explanation of his presence here, since his name is not mentioned in v. 3. Jer. 52:12, 13 explains that he was sent by the king to take charge of the destruction of the city. It

was he that burned the city. **Captain of the guard:** Captain of the king's bodyguard. Literally, *chief of the executioners*; hence a fitting person to discharge such a duty. **Residue of the people that remained in the city:** After the siege, which must have produced the death of many. **Deserters:** They were not permitted to remain in the land, though Jeremiah proclaimed that they should be spared many hardships.

10. **Gave them vineyards, etc.:** Cf. 52:16, where it is said that they were left as vine-dressers and husbandmen. It seems therefore that they were to care for this property, though not to own it.

COMMENTS.

The Destruction of Jerusalem. The narrative of the siege and capture of Jerusalem, especially as it is given in the longer form of 2 Kings 25 and Jer. 51, shows upon the part of the Chaldeans deliberation and a desire to act justly. They were not so cruel a people naturally as the Assyrians, and nowhere is this more clearly manifested than in this incident. That they did condemn Jerusalem to destruction was only after due deliberation and on what would be regarded by many others as justifiable grounds. They had claimed an oversight of the affairs of the city since the time of Jehoiakim. He had been guilty of revolt, and for some reason not fully explained they could not trust Jehoiachin. Zedekiah had been selected for the place and had been bound by the most solemn oath. This he had broken,

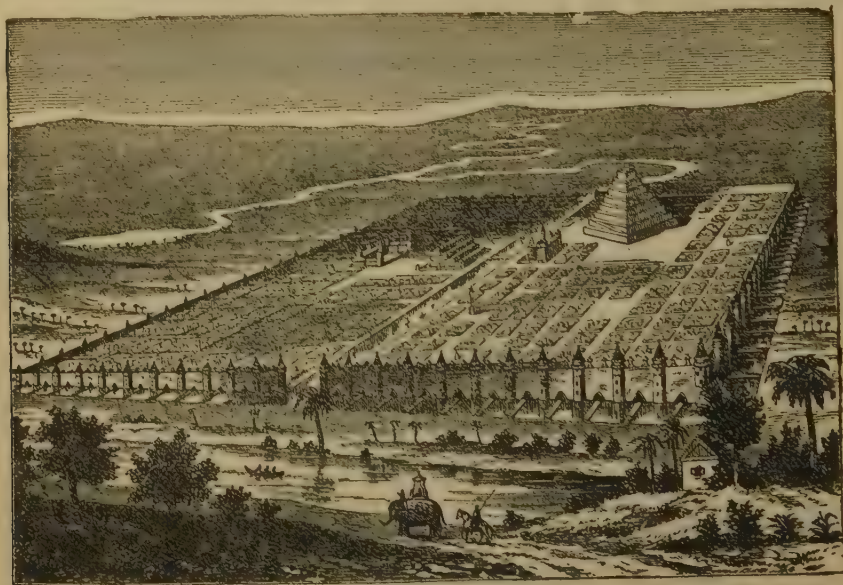
and he, together with all of his subjects, seemed wholly unworthy of confidence. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that in the interest of security it was deemed wise that a city so capable of creating disorder as Jerusalem should be razed.

More Tolerable in the Day of Judgment. "Nebuchadnezzar the king and Ebed-Melech the Ethiopian enhanced the guilt of the Jews. For these, although they were heathen, were not shy of the prophet. The Jews, however, who had grown up with the prophetic words, paid no attention to the divine word but on the contrary subjected the prophet to manifold maltreatment." (Theodoret.)

The Flight of Zedekiah. Just before this destruction of Jerusalem, Ezekiel, among the exiles of Babylon, had enacted a strange pantomime. In the evening

time his neighbors were astonished to see the prophet dig a hole through the mud wall of his house and, with eyes bandaged and a bundle of household goods upon his shoulder, depart from his

again memorable in Jewish annals as a 'day of misery,' when the siege of Titus closed in like manner a day as tragical as the 10th of August in European history—that Nebuzaradan, captain of the royal



CONJECTIONAL VIEW OF BABYLON.

home. He himself explained the significance of this procedure. It symbolized the flight of Zedekiah from his capital. Like a servant he was to bear a burden in his flight, and the bandage that the prophet wore upon his eyes indicated that the king should thus flee with his head muffled. This Zedekiah did, either to disguise himself or to express his great sorrow at the calamity that had befallen him. Ezekiel, however, looked upon it as a sign of Zedekiah's loss of his eyes. (Ezekiel 12:1-12). "In the wide plain, the scene of the first triumph of Joshua, was fought the last fight of the expiring monarchy."

Emotions Over Jerusalem's Fall. "It was not till nearly a month had elapsed, the tenth day of the fifth month, a day

guard, came with orders from Nebuchadrezzar to put the finishing stroke to the work of destruction. The temple, the palace, the houses of the nobles, were deliberately set on fire. The very bones and framework of Jerusalem appeared to be wrapped in flames. The walls and gates seemed to lament and cry, as they sunk into the earth. The sepulchers, even the consecrated catacombs of the kings, were opened, and the bodies thrown out to the vultures and beasts of prey, which flocked to their frightful feast outside the walls. Jackals wandered even over the sacred hill of Zion. Some of the princes were hung up by their hands on the temple walls; others were carried off to execution at Riblah, including the two chief priests

and other officers of the court and camp that were found in the city. The havoc and carnage in the streets was such that passers-by avoided every one they met, lest they should be defiled by their bloody touch. Age and youth, men and women, alike fell victims to the passion or cruelty of the conqueror. The spoils of the temple, those sacred vessels whose fate had been so furiously contested by the prophets of the contending factions, were swept away to adorn the temples or tables of the Babylonian court; and there is a pathetic earnestness in the tone of the historian, as he tells how even the brazen laver, even those two beautiful pillars, which had remained uninjured through so many devastations, which had seemed the pledges of durability and stability, at last, with all their prized and delicate ornaments were broken to pieces, and carried off as mere fragments of metal to Babylon, never to return. In the remains of the population of the Samaritan kingdom it is affecting to see that all sense of ancient rivalry was lost in the grief of the common calamity. Pilgrims from the ancient capitals of Ephraim, Samaria, Shechem, and Shiloh came flocking with shorn beards, gashed faces, torn clothes, and loud wallings, to offer incense on the ruined temple which was not their own. But in the neighboring heathen tribes there was a savage exultation—more bitter to the heart of Judah than the calamity itself—in the thought that the Divine Inheritance had now passed into their hands. There was the fierce Ammonite clapping his hands and stamping with his feet, and the cold-blooded Moabite calmly reviewing the descent of the sacred city to the level of the surrounding nations. The forgotten Philistine was there, reviving his 'old hatred and spiteful heart.' Tyre, on her distant island, rejoiced in the fall of a powerful rival: 'I shall be replenished, now that she is laid waste.' But deepest of all was the indignation roused by the sight of the nearest of kin, the race of Esau often allied to Judah, often independent, now bound

by the closest union with the power that was truly the common enemy of both. There was an intoxication of delight in the wild Edomite chiefs, as at each successive stride against the venerable walls they shouted, 'Down with it! down with it! even to the ground.' They stood in the passes to intercept the escape of those who would have fled down to the Jordan valley; they betrayed the fugitives; they indulged their barbarous revels on the temple hill. Long and loud has been the wail of execration which has gone up from the Jewish nation against Edom. It is the one imprecation which breaks forth from the Lamentations of Jeremiah; it is the culmination of the fierce threats of Ezekiel; it is the sole purpose of the short, sharp cry of Obadiah; it is the bitterest drop in the sad recollections of the Israelite captives by the waters of Babylon; and the one warlike strain of the evangelical prophet is inspired by the hope that the Divine Conqueror should come kneedeep in Idumean blood." (Stanley.)

The Purpose of the Captivity. Amos proclaimed the Captivity as a doom for Israel's sins; Hosea, Jeremiah and other of the prophets, with a truer insight into the divine plan, proclaimed the Captivity, not for the purpose of inflicting a doom, but as a discipline. And herein is summed up the entire philosophy of the Babylonian captivity. It was intended to chastise and humiliate a sinful people, and restore them to God by the way of repentance. If it does not work in them repentance, then it is to be for doom and not for discipline. And this was in truth the outcome of the captivity of Israel. Their stubborn heart was never humbled, and their sinful lips were never brought to prayer; so the twilight of their captivity passed into their night of doom. The ten northern tribes perished as a nation never to rise again. But Judah was humbled by her foreign bondage. She turned to God and forsook her idols.

THE LESSON STORY.

In the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign Jerusalem was taken. For a year and a half preceding its capture the city had been besieged by Nebuchadnezzar and reduced to utter famine. In the book of Lamentations we get a picture of the horrors of this time (Lam. 5:4, 7, 10). The day came finally when there was no more bread in Jerusalem. Hunger and thirst overcome all instinct of pity, and mothers and fathers, like ravenous beasts, devoured their own little ones. Yet even in this time of sore distress, Jeremiah never ceased his efforts to warn and help the people. His proposed policy of submission to the Chaldeans so angered the princes that, but for fear, they would have killed him. As it was, they cast him into another prison, far more horrible than the first. It was from the slime and mire of this awful pit that the prophet was finally rescued through the kindly intercessions and help of Ebed-Melech, the Ethiopian, though he still remained a prisoner. Again Zedekiah sought a secret interview with the prophet, and implored him to reveal the final issue of the siege. The answer was full of comfort. It was not too late even then, through submission, to save the king and people from death, and the city from destruction. Zedekiah accepted the truth of the prophet's words, yet practically denied them. He feared the wrath of the princes and the ridicule of the people more than the voice of God, and lost his last chance of escape. At midnight the siege ended. It was then that a breach was made in the northern city wall. Throughout the exile this terrible day of remembrance was observed by the Jews as a solemn fast. Zedekiah, with his family and attendants, in disguise, tried to escape by night, but were betrayed into the hands of the Chaldeans, and brought before Nebuchadnezzar for trial. As might have been expected, no pity was shown by the mighty conqueror

to this king to whom he had given the throne and from whom he had never received true allegiance. After a brief trial he was doomed to witness with his own eyes the massacre of his two sons and his attendants. To this anguish, more terrible than death, was added the torture of having his eyes put out. Upon Zedekiah, who had blinded himself to every vision of duty and privilege, fell at last the blight of total and irremediable blindness. In fetters he was carried to Babylon, there to end his days in misery and darkness. The sad fate of Judah's king had been foretold with startling exactness in Ezekiel 12:13, which said: "I will bring him to Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, yet he shall not see it; though he shall die there."

Nebuchadnezzar, being too busy to give personal attention to the spoiling of Jerusalem, gave it over into the hands of three of his mighty officers. The horrors of that time beggar all description. Princes were hanged, Levites, women and hoary-headed men were slain. The blood of priests and prophets flowed in the desecrated temple. Later the city was given over to destruction. All the remaining temple treasures were carried away, the walls broken down, and the temple, the palace, and all the houses of the princes destroyed by fire. Nebuchadnezzar's captives included all the people of any wealth or prominence; only the poor were left behind, and to these were given for their cultivation, fields and vineyards. There must have been a tender spot in the heart of the great conqueror, for he remembered Jeremiah, and charged the captain of the guard to "look well to him, and do him no harm." To the prophet, so long imprisoned in the court of the guard, was given liberty and the choice whether to go to Babylon or dwell "among the people." Jeremiah then, as always, made the choice of duty, and decided to remain where he was, most

needed, in his own land. How sad must have been his return to the ruined temple and the desolated city, so dear to his heart! Yet in the midst of his grief faith pointed to a brighter day, for the promise had been given: "Refrain thy

voice from weeping, and thine eyes from tears, for thy work shall be rewarded, and they shall come again from the hand of the enemy, thy children shall come again to their own border." (Jer. 31:15-17.)

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What indicates the persistence of Judah in refusing to heed the words of Jeremiah? Jer. 37:2.

2. For what purpose, however, did Zedekiah send his two servants to Jeremiah? Jer. 37:3, 4.

3. Why was Jeremiah apprehended and cast into prison?

4. What charge was made against him

and what was his reply?

5. Who sent to the dungeon-house for the prophet, and why?

6. What reply did the prophet make to the king's question?

7. What questions and appeal did Jeremiah make to the king?

8. In what respect was Jeremiah's punishment made lighter?

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. Under whose reign and by whom was Jerusalem taken? Jer. 39:1, 9.

2. In what year of the siege was the breach made in the city? Jer. 39:1, 2.

3. After the breach what, then, did the princes do? Jer. 39:3.

4. What did Zedekiah and his men of war do when the Chaldean princes entered the city? Jer. 39:4.

5. What did the Chaldean army do with reference to them? Jer. 39:5.

6. What happened to Zedekiah's sons and the nobles of Judah? Jer. 39:6.

7. What painful and humiliating punishment was inflicted upon the king of Judah? Jer. 39:7.

8. What then did the enemy burn and

what did it break down? Jer. 39:8.

9. Whom did the captain of the guard carry away captive to Babylon? Jer. 39:9.

10. Whom did Nebuzaradan leave in the land, and what did he give them? Jer. 39:10.

11. What special charge had Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, given to the captain of the guard concerning Jeremiah? Jer. 39:11, 12.

12. What, then, was done with the prophet Jeremiah? Jer. 39:14.

13. What word of the Lord came unto Jeremiah while he was shut up in the court of the guard? Jer. 39:16, 17.

14. Why did the Lord say he would show mercy to the Ethiopian? Jer. 39:18.

PRACTICAL LESSONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. Now that both Judah and Samaria have been swept away into captivity, what shall we say as to the wages of sin? Samaria was more wicked than Judah and traveled the downward road at a more rapid rate. Suppose Jeroboam, into whose hand God placed the key of splendid opportunity, as he has placed it in your hand and mine, had used his privi-

lege under the divine direction? How long and glorious might have been the life of the Northern Kingdom! And yet, we have no assurance that his good example would have been followed by succeeding sovereigns. If Judah had been blessed with only such good kings as Josiah and Hezekiah, men who feared God and walked in his ways, its sun

would not have set in the darkness of idolatrous Babylon. Surely sin is a reproach to any nation. Capernaum would have remained a prosperous city for many years if it had only sought and walked in "the narrow way." Outward and temporal prosperity, as well as spiritual well-being, are granted to cities and nations that truly trust in and serve God.

2. But there is a worse captivity than that of Babylon. The captivity of Satan is more to be dreaded. The blindness with which Zedekiah was punished is not so dreadful as that suffered by many a soul, captive under the power of the devil. Siege, poverty, starvation can not be compared with Satan's deadly hardening and destruction of the spiritual life. There is only one captivity to be courted and welcomed, and that is captivity to Christ. His captivity is perfect liberty. To be his "bond-slave" was a joyful privilege to Paul, Jude, James and Simon Peter. To be successful in bringing every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ

was the perfect goal toward which the Apostle pressed and prayed.

3. If those kings of Judah had known Jesus, as we are permitted to know him, what might have been his influence and power upon them and upon their careers as leaders of the nation! If they could have been filled with the spirit of the glorified Christ, as we are permitted to be filled with his spirit, how different might have been their destiny! We do know that our privileges are very great, and God has left us without excuse.

4. However, their rewards and punishments, as recorded in the Bible, were temporal. They were not spiritually illuminated. They did not know God in his real glory as we know him in Christ. A greater than Jeremiah is here—here to allure us by his perfect example; here to show the Father's love; here to say to every burdened and discouraged soul: "Come unto me and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart; and you shall find rest unto your souls."

REVIEW.

GOLDEN TEXT—Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.
Ps. 34:14.

DAILY READINGS.

- Aug. 28.... M—Isaiah 37:14-38—Isaiah's Prophecy Concerning Sennacherib.
Isaiah 52:13-13:12—The Suffering Servant of Jehovah.
Aug. 29.... T—2 Chron. 33:1-20—Manasseh's Wickedness and Penitence.
2 Chron. 34:1-13—Josiah's Devotion to God.
Aug. 30.... W—2 Chron. 34:14-33—The Finding of the Book of the Law.
Aug. 31.... T—Jer. 26:1-24—Jeremiah Tried and Acquitted.
Sept. 1.... F—Jer. 36:1-32—Jehoiakim Burns the Prophet's Book.
Sept. 2.... S—Jer. 37:1-21—Jeremiah Cast into Prison.
Sept. 3.... S—Jer. 39:1-18—Judah Carried Captive to Babylon.

LESSON CONNECTIONS.

In the lessons of this quarter, more than in the earlier ones, Jerusalem assumes a greater importance than the land. At other times the Holy Land and its smaller towns are prominent, but now the land is scarcely mentioned, while the city is the seat of all prominent activity. Details of the city's topography, such as the pool of Gihon, the middle gate, the king's garden, the two walls, are mentioned, which help us in getting a conception of the city as a home of men and women.

These ten lessons also present us with striking examples of devotion to God and apostasy. In all the list of kings which reigned in Jerusalem and Samaria, none was more righteous than Josiah, and none wandered farther from the path of duty than Manasseh. No man strove harder to attach the people to the Law than Josiah, and no king came so near destroying the religion of Jehovah as his grandfather, Manasseh, did.

The religious literature which constituted the support and final court of appeal of Judaism is prominent during the period covered by these lessons. This is true, not only in the case of the discovery of the Book of the Law by Josiah, but

also in the appeal which Jeremiah made to it, in the literary form into which he cast his prophecies, and in the rise during this period of the scribes as a distinct order.

The two most striking figures of this time are the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah. Both come from superior stock—the latter from a priestly family, and the former, it may be, from noble ancestors. Each of them was intensely devoted to duty, and each spent himself in the effort to win his nation to loyalty and devotion to Jehovah.

The kingdom of Judah at this time seems puny and insignificant in contrast with the great world-powers of Assyria and Babylon. They seem at each stage of its history as on the eve of crushing it, but the most prominent feature of the prophetic message is that neither empire has any power except as it came to it from the hand of God. Judah, therefore, need not feel fear because its force is weak and its numbers small. God works not through might nor power, but through men who trust him and shape their lives according to the divine ideal. This lesson is taught especially in the passage which describes the ideal servant of the

Lord. He, though weak, unattractive, oppressed and rejected by men, was nevertheless exalted very high because he bore all of this as a service to God.

Lesson I.—Isaiah's Prophecy Concerning Sennacherib.

Golden Text—Ps. 46:1. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

Lesson Facts—Sennacherib was besieging Lachish, a city of the Philistian Plain. He sent a demand that Hezekiah of Judah should surrender. Hezekiah, it seems, complied with this demand (2 Kings 18: 13-16). Sennacherib either had no confidence in the sincerity of Hezekiah's surrender, or else he received proof of treachery, for he later sent some officers to demand the surrender of the city and to spread discontent among the subjects of Hezekiah. In this they were not entirely successful, though they did fill the king's heart with consternation (Isa. 36, 37:8). At still a later time Sennacherib received news of the approach of an Egyptian host, and fearing that Hezekiah might prove an embarrassing foe in his rear, he sent a letter to him renewing his demand for that ruler's surrender. Hezekiah carried the letter into the temple and there prayed over it, and in reply Isaiah brought to him the reassuring message that the Assyrians should gain no great triumph, God's hand should smite them and Jerusalem should be at peace. One night 185,000 Assyrians perished in their camp, and their power was broken. Sennacherib was compelled to retreat, and later—twenty years, in fact—he was slain.

Lesson II.—The Suffering Servant of Jehovah.

Golden Text—Isa. 53:6. Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all.

Lesson Facts—The last twenty-six chapters of Isaiah deal with the return of the Israelites from bondage and their

life in the land after the restoration. In four distinct places there is a description of an ideal servant of Jehovah. Israel had been called to be God's servant, but it was not yielding perfect service. In contrast to its failures, the prophet pictured the service of a perfect servant. He grew up unnoticed by his contemporaries without the gifts and powers which usually attract. He was furthermore a great sufferer, so that men refrained from gazing at him. Added to these, he suffered an untimely death. Yet of weakness, of suffering, of injustice he never complained. He regarded all of this suffering and wrong as a service to God, and fulfilled this service by bearing it in an uncomplaining spirit. After his life was over and it was too late to correct their mistake, the men of his generation come to view his life in the same light. They learned that his suffering was vicarious and expiatory. He did not suffer because of any wrong that he himself had done, but for the benefit of others, and by his sufferings he justified many. Only one Person has lived a life which was a fulfillment of this ideal, and it is impossible to escape the conclusion that in this way God foreshadowed him and the ideal which he was to give to the world.

Lesson III.—Manasseh's Wickedness and Repentance.

Golden Text—Isa. 1:16, 17. Cease to do evil; learn to do well.

Lesson Facts—When Hezekiah died he was succeeded by his son, who at his accession was but twelve years of age. This son, Manasseh, reigned for fifty-five years, but departed entirely from the standards and ideals of Hezekiah. He restored the worship of the Canaanites, which had survived in the worship of Baalim and Ashteroth. He instituted worship to the heavenly bodies, a form of worship prevalent among the Assyrians and Babylonians, and now seemingly for the first time introduced among the people of Judah.

Many other superstitious rites and idolatrous cults he patronized. In fact, during his reign the worship of Jehovah seemed almost to have been extinguished, for he persecuted those who did not accept his innovations. He was taken captive by the Assyrians and was taken in chains to Babylon. By this he was humbled and prayed to God. He was permitted to return to his throne, and for the rest of his life was a nominal worshiper of Jehovah, though he did not undo his former wrong. After his restoration he carried on some building enterprises and strengthened his fortifications. He was always regarded in the nature of an apostate.

Lesson IV.—Josiah's Devotion to God.

Golden Text—Eccl. 12:1. Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth.

Lesson Facts—After Manasseh's long and idolatrous reign and a brief one by Amon of similar character, the throne of Judah was occupied by a mere child of eight years. This proved to be an exception to the general principle that a nation is unfortunate which has a child to rule over it. This was an exception, because Josiah proved to be ardently devout to the worship of Jehovah, on the observance of which the safety and welfare of this nation depended. There must have been some influence which directed his young mind Godward, though it is not known in just what this influence consisted. At any rate, when he had reigned but eight years, when he was then only sixteen years of age, his religious bias was evident, for "he began to seek after the God of David his father." Four years later he commenced to destroy the idolatrous objects which had been erected during the reign of Manasseh. In this he was very thorough, carrying his reform even into the territory of the northern kingdom. Six years later he attempted to repair the temple and to establish the worship of Jehovah more perfectly.

In accomplishing this he made a discovery which greatly stimulated its progress.

Lesson V.—The Finding of the Book of the Law.

Golden Text—Ps. 119:11. Thy word have I laid up in my heart, that I might not sin against thee.

Lesson Facts—Mention was made in summing up the facts of the previous lesson of a discovery made while Josiah's workmen were repairing the temple. The priest Hilkiah told Shaphan the scribe that he had found "the book of the law in the house of Jehovah." Both men realized that it was a find of some importance, and the latter carried the tidings at once to the king and read portions of the book to him. The reading startled the king so that in his consternation he rent his garments and sent some of his officers to inquire of the Lord whether the penalty there imposed for disobedience should be rigidly and fully enforced. These messengers made their inquiry from Huldah, a prophetess living in Jerusalem. Her answer was to the effect that the full penalty imposed in the law for idolatry should fall upon the nation because of their disobedience, but the king should be spared in that his death should come before this national calamity. The king on hearing this reply summoned all his subjects into his presence and read or had read to them all of the newly discovered book. He and they then entered into a solemn covenant to keep the law. They accordingly began at once to obey it by destroying all idolatrous objects. During all his life Josiah kept his covenant.

Lesson VI.—Jeremiah Tried and Acquitted.

Golden Text—Ps. 27:1.—Jehovah "is my light and my salvation: whom shall I fear?"

Lesson Facts.—The second king after Josiah was Jehoiakim. Early in his reign

the prophet Jeremiah was told to stand in the court of the temple and deliver a message to the people there assembled for worship. The substance of this message was that unless the people obeyed God they should be punished, and the city and the temple should be destroyed as Shiloh had been. He was heard by the people, by prophets and priests. When they heard his sermon their indignation was aroused at his statement that Jerusalem should be destroyed. They considered it unpatriotic.

The prophet was arrested and tried before the princes of the land. His accusers were the priests and false prophets, and they asked that a verdict of death be pronounced against him. Jeremiah made his defense by stating that his message was given him from God. He urged them to take note of that fact and obey him. He asked no special favor for himself, but warned them that his death would involve the disfavor of God. The princes pronounced him not guilty and acquitted him. Certain elders justified this sentence by citing the case of Micah, who had made a similar prediction and had been unmolested by Hezekiah, the king in his day.

Lesson VII.—Jehoiakim Burns the Prophet's Book.

Golden Text—Isa 40:8.—The word of our God shall stand forever.

Lesson Facts—Four years after the incident of the previous lesson Jeremiah was told by the Lord to write all of the messages which he had delivered during his prophetic career in a book and then read the book in the hearing of the people.

He used as his secretary the scribe Baruch, who copied the messages as he delivered them. Something like nine months or more were consumed by this task, and then Baruch was sent by Jeremiah to read the book before the assembled nation. One of those who heard the book was a grandson of Shaphan. He carried the news of what was going on to the

princes, who were assembled in a room of the palace. They sent a request that Baruch bring his book and read it to them. This he did and they, after warning Baruch and Jeremiah to conceal themselves, took it and read it to the king. Only two or three columns were read, however, when the king cut the book into pieces with a scribe's knife, and cast it into the fire, where it was burned. It was wanton disregard of the divine message, but the character of the wicked court is seen from the statement that no one of the courtiers was dismayed by it.

Lesson VIII.—Jeremiah Cast Into Prison.

Golden Text.—Matt. 5:11. Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you and persecute you and say all manner of evil against you falsely for my sake.

Lesson Facts—On the death of Jehoiakim the throne of Judah was occupied by Jehoiachin, and after his brief reign of three months Zedekiah became king. His course was such as to antagonize the king of Babylon and at length the siege of Jerusalem commenced. In this extremity Zedekiah sent to Jeremiah asking for his prayers on behalf of the city. It was scarcely to be expected that Jeremiah could give the king hope, for he had previously predicted a defeat and had advised surrender to the Chaldeans. The approach of an Egyptian army led the Chaldeans to suspend the siege and in the midst of the popular rejoicing over this, Jeremiah proclaimed the message that the Egyptian army should be driven back into Egypt and the Chaldeans should return to the siege of Jerusalem, and should be victorious. In the lull of the siege Jeremiah started to go to the land of Benjamin on business, but was arrested at the gate of the city on the charge of intended desertion to the enemy. He was cast into prison and there remained for a number of days. When the siege recommenced, as Jeremiah predicted it would, Zedekiah sent for the prophet and asked what

would be the issue of the siege. He did not hesitate to declare that Zedekiah would be captured by the king of Babylon. For himself he asked a milder treatment, which was granted him.

Lesson IX.—Judah Carried Captive to Babylon.

Golden Text.—Num. 32:23.—Be sure your sin will find you out.

Lesson Facts—Jerusalem was finally captured in the eleventh year of Zedekiah. The historian gives the precise date. It was in the ninth day of the fourth month. Entrance was gained by a breach made in the city walls, and the Chaldean officers took up a position in what is called the middle gate, which was seemingly a gate in some wall which ran through the city, and not the encompassing one. Here they

rested for the night, intending, it is probable, to renew the attack in the morning. During the night, however, Zedekiah and his court fled. They escaped through a gate at the southeast corner of the city. They succeeded in reaching the vicinity of Jericho, but there they were overtaken and captured. Zedekiah was taken to Nebuchadrezzar, who was at Riblah. The sons of Zedekiah and the nobles of Judah were slain, and then his own eyes were put out, and he was sent in chains to Babylon. The punishment was severe because he had broken his oath of fidelity. Nebuzaradan, a Chaldean officer, was sent with instructions to destroy Jerusalem and the temple. This he did just one month after its capture. The people who remained were taken to Babylon as captives.

REVIEW FOR THE THIRD QUARTER.

Lesson I.

Subject—"Isaiah's Prophecy Concerning Sennacherib." Isa. 37:14-38.

Question—What did Hezekiah do in his distress, what message did Isaiah send him and what was the result?

Golden Text—Psa. 46:1: "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

Lesson II.

Subject—"The Suffering Servant of Jehovah." Isa. 52:13-53:12.

Question—What did Isaiah prophesy concerning the humiliation, character and exaltation of the Messiah, the Suffering Servant of Jehovah?

Golden Text—Isa. 53:6: "Jehovah hath laid on him the iniquity of us all."

Lesson III.

Subject—"Manasseh's Wickedness and Penitence." 2 Chron. 33:1-20.

Question—What was the moral character of his reign? What led to repentance

and what fruits showed that his repentance was genuine?

Golden Text—Isa. 1:16, 17: "Cease to do evil; learn to do well."

Lesson IV.

Subject—"Josiah's Devotion to God." 2 Chron. 34:1-13.

Question—What quality of character did he show? What work did he do and what testimony is written concerning him?

Golden Text—Ecc. 12:1: "Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth."

Lesson V.

Subject—"The Finding of the Book of the Law." 2 Chron. 34:14-33.

Question—Who found the book? Where? What effect did it produce upon Josiah and what steps did he take to avert the trouble prophesied?

Golden Text—Psalm 119:11: "Thy word have I laid up in my heart, that I might not sin against thee."

Lesson VI.

Subject—"Jeremiah Tried and Acquitted."
Jer. 26.

Question—What message was Jeremiah told to speak? Where? To whom? Why and with what results?

Golden Text—Psa. 27:1: "Jehovah is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?"

Lesson VII.

Subject—"Jehoiakim Burns the Prophet's Book." Jer. 36.

Question—What was Jeremiah told to do with his words? Who assisted him? To whom were they read by Jehudi, and what was the result?

Golden Text—Isa. 40:8: "The word of our God shall stand forever."

Lesson VIII.

Subject—"Jeremiah Cast into Prison."
Jer. 37.

Question—Why and by whom was Jeremiah cast into prison? Who sent for him? What questions were asked, and what was done to relieve his suffering?

Golden Text—Matt. 5:11: "Blessed are ye when men shall reproach you, and persecute you, and say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake."

Lesson IX.

Subject—"Judah Carried Captive to Babylon." Jer. 39.

Question—Under whose reign and by whom was Jerusalem taken? What was done to the king and his sons, and what was done with Jeremiah?

Golden Text—Num. 32:23: "Be sure your sin will find you out."

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. It was a great blessing to have such a prophet in Judah as Isaiah, who could warn the people authoritatively from God against the consequences of sin. It must have been a marvelous joy to receive the message concerning the overthrow of Sennacherib's army, before which all Jerusalem was in mortal terror. Teaching of great prophets and miracles of mercy were not sufficient, however, to lead the nation to deep and permanent reformation. The overthrow was only delayed; it must come, on account of the nation's sins, although repentance, if deep, universal and not too late, would have saved Jerusalem.

2. The Suffering Servant is an example to the Church. It must be heroic, willing to serve and suffer for others; but, withal, sustained, enriched and made triumphant by the ever-present and triumphant Lord.

3. Manasseh presents an unusual picture of great wickedness cured by great

suffering through the providence of God. He went deeper into sin than his predecessors. Convinced perfectly that Jehovah was the living God and that sin was the cause of sorrow and failure, his repentance was so genuine that God received him back to responsibility and honor. We are taught both in the Old and New Testaments not to despise the chastenings of Jehovah, but to receive them obediently, as sons.

4. Beautiful and consistent piety characterized king Josiah. It reminds one of Jesus, the obedient child, subject to parents and always pleasing his Father in heaven. This reminds us that youthful devotion to God should be encouraged. Godliness in childhood is normal and wholesome.

5. The word of the Lord had been lost. Its discovery caused great enthusiasm and produced trembling also, for its warnings were believed. We are finding it anew to-day in the Bible schools and in

the preaching. It may be formally accepted and yet practically lost. It must needs be closely applied to our conditions and characters. Teachers should study to be approved unto God in its use.

6. Jeremiah spoke God's word as commanded, diminishing nothing, and created consternation. He was seized and threatened, but the princes decided he was not worthy of death. Courage, intelligence, and fidelity are in demand.

7. Jehoiakim burns the prophet's book, but the prophet reproduces it and adds more words of Jehovah. God's word, though burned, is indestructible. The prophet seems to view with horror the irreverence of the king and his servants toward the sacred roll that was first cut and then burned. Jesus is the true Word. The Word became flesh and dwelt among us. Great indeed are our opportunities, and hence our responsibilities. Our calling is to exhibit in our daily conduct the gospel of Christ.

8. Jeremiah, as an innocent man, was cast into prison. His dungeon home was

horrible. But king Zedekiah sent for him to hear his message. The prophet asked two questions so practical and pivotal that the king removed him from the dungeon and put him in the court of the guard. Men who speak the word ably and apply it directly to the disease of the community or to the corrupt conduct of classes and individuals are naturally hated by the wicked, who will not forsake their sins. It will be even as it has been. The gospel now so widely prevalent makes it safer for men to speak boldly.

9. Judah is carried at last into Babylon. How patient God has been to Judah, "rising up early" and sending prophet after prophet to warn the nation and hew away its wickedness. Jesus wept over this same city, saying: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that killeth the prophets, and stoneth them that are sent unto her! How often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathered her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" The philosophy of history shows the terrible and inevitable consequences of sin.

Lesson XI.

September 10.

DANIEL AND HIS COMPANIONS.

Daniel 1:8-20. (Temperance Lesson.)

GOLDEN TEXT—It is good not to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor to do anything whereby thy brother stumbleth. Rom. 14:21.

Memory Verses—8. 9. **Suggested Reading**—Chapter 1. **Time**—605 B. C.
Persons—Daniel, Nebuchadnezzar, the prince of eunuchs, and the steward.
Places—Land of Shinar and Babylon.

DAILY READINGS.

Sept. 4.....M—Dan. 1:8-20—Daniel and His Companions.
 Sept. 5.....T—Dan. 1:1-7—The Temptations of Daniel and His Companions.
 Sept. 6.....W—Jer. 35:1-19—The Fidelity of the Rechabites.
 Sept. 7.....T—Rom. 14:13-23—Refusing to Eat Flesh and Drink Wine.
 Sept. 8.....F—1 Cor. 8:1-13—Not Causing my Brother to Stumble.
 Sept. 9.....S—Gal. 5:13-26—Crucifying the Flesh with the Passions Thereof.
 Sept. 10....S—Rom. 13:1-14—Walking not in Reveling and Drunkenness.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Shinar. The spoil taken from Jerusalem was taken to the land of Shinar. This was evidently the land over which Nebuchadnezzar ruled and "seems to have been the ancient name of the great alluvial tract through which the Tigris and Euphrates pass before reaching the sea—the tract known in later times as Chaldaea or Babylonia. It was a plain country, where brick had to be used for stone, and slime (mud?) for mortar

(Gen. 11:3). Among its cities were Babel (Babylon), Erech or Orech, Calneh or Calno (probably Niffer), and Accad, the site of which is unknown. These notices are quite enough to fix the situation. It may, however, be remarked further, that the Septuagint renders the word 'Babylonia' in one place (Isa. 10:11), and by 'the land of Babylon' in another (Zech. 5:11)." (Smith's Bible Dictionary)

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

Babylon came into a position to dominate Judah and western Asia in the year 605 B. C., which was three years after the death of Josiah. Prior to this time the two empires which had contested for supremacy were Assyria and Egypt. The fall of Nineveh in 606 B. C. marked the end of the former's career, and the battle of Carchemish expelled the latter from Asia. The commander of the Babylonian forces in the battle of Carchemish was Nebuchadnezzar, who was not yet king. After his signal victory over the forces of Pharaoh-Neco in this bat-

tle, he pushed southward, bringing each kingdom and city to submit to the authority of Babylon. He had gone as far south as the borders of Egypt when he was recalled to Babylon by the death of his father. He then assumed the throne. The historical books of the Old Testament contain accounts of three campaigns against Jerusalem which were waged during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. The first was during the reign of Jehoiakim, and according to the statement of Kings (2 Kings 24:1,2), was after that king had been a faithful vas-

sal for three years. Nebuchadnezzar did not carry on this war in person, but sent against Jerusalem bands of mercenary troops obtained from surrounding nations. This must have been in the seventh year of Jehoiakim, or in the year 600 B. C. The second campaign against Jerusalem was in the year 597 B. C., at which time Jehoiachin, his mother, and ten thousand soldiers and craftsmen were deported to Babylon. The third campaign against Jerusalem waged by Nebuchadnezzar was in 588-586 B. C., at which time the city was burned. No doubt there were a number of visits paid by Chaldean forces to Jerusalem in addition to those to collect duty and settle disputes, but these are the only ones which the historical books mention that are of sufficient importance to justify the name campaign. The book of Daniel, however, gives information concerning another, which was in fact earlier than any of these mentioned. It was in the third year of Jehoiakim.

While this visit paid to Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar is not expressly mentioned in any other book of the Old Testament, it is implied in the language of 2 Kings 24:1 that "Jehoiakim became his servant three years; then he turned and rebelled against him." The campaign against the rebel Jehoiakim was the first one mentioned above. There must at least have been an invasion of the land before this, and it was at this time that Daniel and his companions were made captives.

An apparent discrepancy has sometimes been alleged between the date of this captivity in the third year of Jehoiakim and the statement of Jeremiah (25:1), that the fourth year of Jehoiakim was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar. The discrepancy is only apparent. Nebuchadnezzar made this campaign and took Daniel captive before his father's death and before he became king. He is called king of Babylon by anticipation or, as seems probable, he was associated with his father in the labor of reigning.

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

Along with the spoils from the temple were taken a number of captives. The master of eunuchs was commanded to select certain youths from them of good family and physical and mental excellence, that they might be trained to serve the king. The course of instruction was to cover a period of three years (v. 5). During this time they were, according to oriental custom, to have daily food and drink provided at the king's expense. The physical beauty and attractiveness of their attendants was the pride of oriental monarchs, and royal directions were given that this food

should be such as would nourish them and impart to them a well-kept appearance. Of those selected, four are designated by name, and the first of them was Daniel. They were given new names, which, like the ones that they replaced, had a religious, though in this case an idolatrous, signification. Ewald thinks that Nebuchadnezzar's purpose was by means of the education and training which he gave them to alienate them from their own people and attach them to his own dynasty. He succeeded in the latter purpose, but signally failed in the former. The present lesson will tell why he failed.

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 8. He would not defile himself, etc.: "The reason for refusing the food and the wine was not because he would thereby violate the Levitical distinction between clean and unclean

meats, for the law permitted them to partake of wine, which they now refuse. It was instead, because there was a heathen "custom of consecrating each meal by offering a portion to the gods.

8 But Daniel purposed in his heart that he would not defile himself with the king's dainties, nor with the wine which he drank: therefore he requested of the prince of the eunuchs that he might not defile himself. 9 Now God made Daniel to find kindness and compassion in the sight of the prince of the eunuchs. 10 And the prince of the eunuchs said unto Dan-

iel, I fear my lord the king, who hath appointed your food and your drink: for why should he see your faces worse looking than the youths that are of your own age? so would ye endanger my head with the king. 11 Then said Daniel to the steward whom the prince of the eunuchs had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: 12 Prove

In order to prevent their being involved in idolatry by partaking of food which had been thus dedicated to the gods (cf. 1 Cor. 10:18, 20), they avoided especially those kinds of food which were commonly offered to the gods, hence those prepared from flesh, wine or flour. The vegetables, such as pulse, cabbage, etc., of which alone they were willing to partake, were indeed also prepared by the heathen cooks of the king . . .

but, since offerings or libations were never taken from them, they were not specially sacred to the gods, and hence might be used by pious Jews without any essential defilement of conscience." (Zockler.) **King's dainties:** The word means luxurious food, and is of Persian origin, and is equivalent to "apportioned food." **The prince of the eunuchs:** In v. 3 his name is given as Ashpenaz. He is there called the *master of the eunuchs*. He was the same as the Rab-saris (Jer. 39:3) of the Babylonian court. The same officer in the Babylonian court is called the Kishlar-Aga.

9. **God made Daniel to find, etc.:** In accordance with biblical language, which attributes all results to God. We would express the same thought by saying that the prince of the eunuchs regarded Daniel kindly. The biblical language emphasizes the divine activity.

10. **I fear my lord the king:** This fear and the consequent hesitation were perfectly natural. "He was servant to a king who could execute children before the eyes of their father (2 Kings 25:7; Jer. 39:6), and in a moment of

passion threaten with death the 'wise men' of his country (2:5-12). 'Ye would endanger my head,' was a simple fact familiar to every one who offended the capricious mood of an oriental despot, and knew that the penalty for disobedience was death. If the king saw the faces of these children worse looking, it would not be they but their guardian who would suffer." **Why should he see, etc.:** A poetic way of expressing a negative. He does not in these words "positively refuse the favor which Daniel seeks, but intimates that in order to avoid the royal displeasure, he must render at least a formal and apparent obedience to the command he had received. Aside from this he shows his readiness to exercise every possible forbearance towards his wards." In the main, however, his reply must be taken as a refusal of Daniel's request. This is shown further from Daniel's proposal to the steward.

11. **The steward:** He was subordinate to Ashpenaz and had the immediate care of the young men. The sequel shows that Daniel had found favor in his sight as well as in the sight of the prince of the eunuchs.

12. **Prove thy servants . . . ten days:** This shows Daniel's perseverance. Refused by the prince of the eunuchs, he renews his request in a modified form to the subordinate. The ten days were long enough to show the effect of the food, but not long enough to seem dangerous to the steward. **Pulse:** Vegetable diet. (See margin.)

thy servants, I beseech thee, ten days; and let them give us pulse to eat, and water to drink. 13 Then let our countenances be looked upon before thee, and the countenance of the youths that eat of the king's dainties; and as thou seest, deal with thy servants.

14 So he hearkened unto them in this matter, and proved them ten days. 15 And at the end of ten days their countenances appeared fairer, and they were fatter in flesh, than all the youths that did eat of the king's dainties. 16 So the steward took away their dainties, and the wine that they should drink, and gave them pulse.

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13. As thou seest, deal with thy servants: Decide whether you will continue the favor according to the results of your observation.

15. Their countenances appeared fairer: The experiment proved a complete success, and consequently from an experiment it was changed to a fixed policy.

16. Gave them pulse: Rawlinson says that in Daniel's day the ordinary diet of the common people was dried dates pressed into cakes, gourds, melons and cucumbers; and the ordinary drink was goat's milk. The food of Daniel and his companions probably did not differ greatly from that eaten by the majority of his countrymen (cf. 1 Sam. 17:17).

17. God gave them knowledge and skill: "The blessing which God had given to the food of the body, he extended also to the soul. As he gave health to the body, so he gave light and knowledge to the soul." (Rawlinson.) Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams: This was a special gift bestowed upon Daniel alone, it will be observed. "It has been made a question, whether this gift was a permanent habit

17 Now as for these four youths, God gave them knowledge and skill in all learning and wisdom: and Daniel had understanding in all visions and dreams. 18 And at the end of the days which the king had appointed for bringing them in, the prince of the eunuchs brought them in before Nebuchadnezzar. 19 And the king communed with them; and among them all was found none like Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah: therefore stood they before the king. 20 And in every matter of wisdom and understanding, concerning which the king inquired of them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters that were in all his realm.

always remaining with him or a faculty given on special occasions. It is particularly said that Daniel had knowledge in all dreams and visions, which perhaps may mean a great aptitude for the exercise of this gift, while its presence was on every particular occasion an answer to prayer. This was certainly the case in the first dream of Nebuchadnezzar (2:16; 20:11)." (Rawlinson.)

18. At the end of the days, etc.: This was at the end of a three years' course (v. 5). For bringing them in: Not merely the four youths, but all the Israelitish youths (c.-vs. 3-19). The prince of the eunuchs: Ashpenaz has now taken charge of the youths again.

19. Communed: That is, the king entered into general conversation with them. They stood this test creditably. Stood before the king: That is, they became his servants (cf. Luke 1:19).

20. The king inquired of them: This refers to a more searching examination of them, with especial reference to a particular subject, than that indicated by the statement that the king communed with them. In this, too, he found them superior.

COMMENTS.

Daniel's Refusal of the King's Food.

Daniel's purpose not to partake of the king's food was due, not to the belief that vegetable food is superior to fleshly diet, nor to any conviction that wine is unwholesome and injurious, nor to a belief that this food would produce ceremonial defilement, but to the conviction that he would thereby be implicating himself in heathendom. The common people among the Jews partook of vegetable food more usually than flesh, but this was on account of their not being able to procure the latter. The sacred feasts were largely made up of meat, and they never thought that such food was either wrong or unhygienic. Their Scriptures permitted wine, and the language of Dan. 10:3 implies that in his own home and under normal conditions he partook of wine. He did not seek to avoid ceremonial defilement in refusing this food, for the vegetables would have produced this no less than the dainties and the wine. His sole reason was because he would thereby become a partaker of meats offered to idols.

Ashpenaz's Fear was Well Grounded. (v. 10.) "Babylonian nobles trembled for their heads if they incurred by slight fault the displeasure of the monarch; and even the most powerful class in the kingdom, the learned and venerable 'Chaldeans,' ran on one occasion the risk of being exterminated, because they could not expound a dream which the king had forgotten. If a monarch displeased his court, and was regarded as having a bad disposition, it was not thought enough simply to make away with him, but he was put to death by torture. Among recognized punishments were cutting to pieces and casting into a heated furnace. The houses of offenders were pulled down and made into dung hills. These practices imply a violence and cruelty beyond the ordinary oriental limit; and we can not be surprised that when final judgment

was denounced against Babylon, it was declared to be sent, in a great measure, 'because of men's blood, and for the violence of the land, of the city, and all that dwelt therein.'" (Rawlinson.)

Source of Daniel's Resolution. (v. 8.) "Daniel's resolution to refrain from such unclean food flowed from fidelity to the law, and from steadfastness to the faith, 'that man liveth not by bread only, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of the Lord.' (Deut. 8:3)."—(Keil.)

An Act of Faith. (vs. 12, 13.) The excellence of Daniel's act lies in the fact that it was an act of faith. Nothing in the text warrants the assumption that he had received a divine admonition from the Lord to act in this way, though if it could be proved that he was moved to do so by the Holy Spirit, as Calvin asserts, this would not effect the fact that it was an act of faith. Of Ashpenaz he made the request that he be permitted to refrain from defiling himself. He asked of the steward that he and his companions be permitted to make trial of the matter. On Daniel's part it was an act of pure faith in God, and the result was a result of faith. Daniel trusted in God, and the fact that they appeared better is to be understood as a divine act in their favor. The Lord interposed in behalf of those who put trust in him.

A Result of Faith. (v. 15.) The result of their abstaining from the dainties and the wine was that "their countenance appeared fairer and they were fatter in flesh than all the youths that did eat of the king's dainties," but it is scarcely fair to the text to argue from this in favor of a vegetable diet, as has sometimes been done.

The author certainly did not intend that this conclusion should be drawn from the incident. Nor is the lesson to be deduced from this that it is in itself wrong or injurious to partake of wine.

The author understood that this incident teaches that God is one who takes care of his own, and when these children threw themselves in trust upon his protection, he did not forsake them. The lesson is not that Daniel's food was better than other food, but that his God is greater than other gods. The teaching on behalf of temperance is not in the fact that Daniel refrained from wine or from food that

under some circumstances is too heavy, but in the fact that in the interest of his religion he exercised a strong self-control.

"Faithful found
Among the faithless, faithful only he
Among innumerable false; unmoved,
Unshaken, unseduced, unfrightened,
His loyalty he kept, his love and zeal.
Nor number nor example with him wrought
To swerve from truth, or change his constant
mind,
Though single."

LESSON STORY.

The stories of the fiery furnace and the lions' den thrilled us in our childhood. They taught us that God is a living God; that he cares for those who trust him; that he is able to deliver them out of trouble.

The nation of Judah, like Israel, became too wicked to exist as a kingdom, and as naturally as a house falls when undermined, so did Judah fall. God had a good design in permitting Nebuchadnezzar to carry Judah away out into captivity, or slavery. The remnant should be taught, what in Jerusalem they had been unable to learn, the vanity and abominations of idolatry.

Nebuchadnezzar was looking out for bright boys. Every city and kingdom, every business and community needs boys. He told Ashpenaz, one of his master servants, to look out for youths with no blemish in them. I suppose he wanted them to be handsome, quick-witted, well-trained, obedient and especially wide-awake in knowledge, skillful in wisdom, and fit to stand in the presence of the king. Of course they must be polite. Certainly they must be trustworthy. He did not ask that they be religious. Perhaps he would have preferred them not pious. But somehow politeness and religion go together. Reliability and faith in God hang together like one garment. Even saloon-keepers seek total abstainers for bar-tenders. Merchants and corporations want honest, industrious, intelligent and courteous employes. The true foundation

for fitness in any right business or association is true religion.

Nebuchadnezzar wanted docile youths who could learn quickly and perfectly the Chaldean language. He would not let them suffer for lack of proper food and sufficiently stimulating drinks. Every day they were to be fed on the king's dainties and allowed to drink the king's choicest wine. Boys are very fond of good food and plenty of it. They were to be fed the choicest meats for three years, and for the same time permitted the favorite drinks. But the boys selected had, in addition to healthy bodies, vigorous minds and courteous manners, what was superior to all these, namely, a conscience toward God. Here are their names: Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. Daniel meant "the judgment of God;" Hananiah meant the "gift of God;" Mishael signified "who is what God is;" and Azariah stood for "whom the Lord helps. "No wonder their names were changed." "Belteshazzar" was the name given to Daniel, and meant "favored of the god Bel," Shadrach signified "royal, or great scribe;" Meshach stood for "guest of a king;" and Abednego meant "a servant of Nego." Their names were changed, but not their character and steadfast purpose to be mindful of and obedient to the living God, Jehovah.

We have sung, perhaps, "Dare to be a Daniel," and "Are your windows open toward Jerusalem?" and, maybe, a song concerning "The Hebrew Children." At

any rate, this wonderful book of Daniel has had a mighty influence upon the boys and girls who have known by heart its splendid stories of fidelity to conviction, of courage, of faith in God and of God's guidance and deliverance.

Daniel seems to have been the noble leader of his three companions. He was more highly gifted than they were, although they were remarkable in the favors which the Lord bestowed upon them. Daniel had a purpose high and true and was as steadfast to his purpose as the needle is to the pole. Daniel became a special favorite at court. He made a perfectly deferential and manly request of the prince to whose care he had been intrusted, that he might not defile himself with the king's dainties. The prince was afraid Daniel was making a mistake. Daniel, being a favorite, asked the stew-

ard—the man who had immediate control of the boys mentioned—to prove them for ten days, feeding them on pulse or pottage made of meal. The experiment was a success. At the end of the ten days they were fairer and fatter than the youths that ate of the king's dainties.

The king was so pleased with the ability and skill of the boys in all things concerning which he examined them that, in due season and at the request of Daniel, who had told the king's forgotten dream and had been made a ruler over the province of Babylon, he appointed Daniel's companions over the affairs of the province and allowed Daniel to abide in the king's gate. These boys were godly, temperate, intelligent, polite, skilled in wisdom, and so thoroughly trustworthy, that the king esteemed them highly and greatly honored them in his kingdom.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. Of what particular period does the historical part of Daniel treat?

Answer: It treats of the time of the Babylonian captivity.

2. What honor is accorded to this book in the Bible?

Answer: It is often quoted in the New Testament—referred to by Jesus, Paul, John and Luke. It exercised a marked influence on parts of the New Testament.

3. What king of Judah and what king of Babylon are named in the first sentence in the book and in reference to what event? Dan. 1:1.

4. What striking contrast is here presented between Babylon and the Jews?

Answer: Nebuchadnezzar was at the height of his power; Judah was a very

feeble folk. But God was still willing to console and use the remnant.

5. What two impressive lessons do we find set forth in the book of Daniel?

Answer: Extraordinary manifestations of God's power as the Keeper of Israel, and singular visions of God; fitted to humble the heathen and develop faith and hope in the hearts of the dejected Jews.

6. After all the faults, sorrows and overthrow of God's chosen people, what blessings can we see in store for the world through this captivity?

Answer: A mission of God in the heart of heathenism and a better preparation of Israel as the human instrumentality through which to usher in the new and Christian dispensation.

QUESTIONS UPON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. What purposefulness is shown on the part of Daniel in the palace? Dan. 1:8-20.
2. What do you understand by the element referred to here? Lev. 11:47; Ezek. 4:14; Acts 10:14.

3. What, therefore, did Daniel request and of whom? Dan. 1:8.

4. Why did Daniel find kindness in the prince of eunuchs? Dan. 1:10.

5. What did the prince of eunuchs fear and believe? Dan. 1:10.

6. What did Daniel say to the steward over him and his three companions?

7. According to what, after the test, might be the decision? Dan. 1:13.

8. What was the result of the experiment made? Dan. 1:15.

9. What special gifts did God bestow upon the four youths Dan. 1:17.

10. What extra gift did he grant to his servant Daniel? Dan. 1:17.

11. Before whom were they called to stand and with what approval? Dan. 1:18-20.

12. Give the names of the four young men? Dan. 1:19, compare v. 7.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

1. What wonderful verse of Scripture declares God's providence in causing "all things to work together for good to them who love God"? Rom. 8:28.

2. What other passage, in the Sermon on the Mount reveals the Father's careful attention bestowed upon his children? Matt. 6:26-32.

3. Where does the phrase "Son of man," so often appropriated by our Saviour, originate in the book of Daniel? Dan. 7:13.

The Revelation given to John on the Isle of Patmos is pervaded with the language and symbols of this book.

4. Daniel, like Joseph and Josiah, was singularly pure in character. He, like them, was also strong in resolution and purpose. They are of a type with Nathanael and Timothy of the New Testament. Purity and strength of character are naturally blended. "His strength was as the strength of ten because his heart was pure." It is an invaluable lesson for the young to learn, that purity is a necessary element of strength.

5. God chose splendid young boys as his missionaries for the government and palace in Babylon. What a striking example are these youths of the ideal and desirable disposition and character, con-

duct and influence of young men. How manly they were! How self-controlled and full of faith! How loyal to God and his revelation even under the most unfavorable conditions! They remind one of Moses in the court of Pharaoh, refusing to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter and choosing to suffer affliction with the people of God rather than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season; accounting the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt. Did not Daniel, too, account the reproach of Christ—whose spirit was in the prophets (1 Pet. 1:10)—greater riches than the treasures of Babylon? His faith is mentioned in the New Testament in the catalogue of Old Testament heroes (Heb. 11:33), although his name is not called.

6. Such self-control, sobriety of mind, self-denial, mastery of appetite and bodily inclinations, such courage to be singular in order to be sincere, such high ideals of daily conduct—surely all these qualities furnish a splendid and just foundation for a lesson on "Temperance." The Golden Text is commended to both old and young as expressive of the spirit of the New Testament religion with reference to others who might be injured by injurious example (Rom. 14:21).

Lesson XII.

September 17.

DANIEL'S COMPANIONS IN THE FIERY FURNACE.

Daniel 3. * (Print 13-28.)

GOLDEN TEXT—The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what shall man do unto me? Heb. 13:6.

Memory Verses—17, 18. **Time**—About 600 B. C. **Persons**—Nebuchadnezzar, Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego and counsellors of the king. **Place**—The plain of Dura in the province of Babylon.

DAILY READINGS.

Sept. 11....M—Dan. 3:1-30—Daniel's Companions in the Fiery Furnace.
 Sept. 12....T—Job 5:17-27—"He Will Deliver Thee in Six Troubles."
 Sept. 13....W—Psa. 27:1-14—The Lord is my Salvation; Whom Shall I Fear?
 Sept. 14...T—Isaiah 26:1-10—"Thou Wilt Keep Him in Perfect Peace."
 Sept. 15....F—Jer. 1:1-10—"I am With Thee to Deliver Thee."
 Sept. 16...S—Jer. 15:11-21—"I am With Thee to Save Thee."
 Sept. 17....S—Psa. 9:1-14—"Thou, O Lord, hast not Forsaken Them."

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES. *

Rawlinson states that there are three places in Babylon called Dura. Two of these are impossible of identification with the Dura mentioned by Daniel, because they were too far removed from Babylon, for the location of this place must be sought within the province bearing this name. "We must, without doubt, seek for this plain in the neighborhood of Babylon, where, according to the statement of Oppert, there are at present to be found in the southwest of the ruins

representing the former capital, a row of mounds which bear the name of Dura; and at the end of them, along with two longer mounds, there is a smaller one which forms a square of six meters high with a basis of fourteen meters wholly built of unburned bricks, and which shows so surprising a resemblance to a colossal statue with its pedestal, that Oppert believes this little mound to be the remains of the golden image erected by Nebuchadnezzar." (Keil.)

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

Our last lesson described the leaving of the training school to enter into the service of the king. Two years later their knowledge was put to a sore trial. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream, but by morning he had forgotten it. His mind was still disturbed, however, and he summoned his magicians and wise men and with more than the usual unreasonable despotism of oriental monarchs, he demanded that they tell him the dream and its interpretation. This they were unable to do, and

their plea that the demand was unreasonable and without precedent was of no avail. He issued against them the decree of death, a sentence which applied to all of their class, and so included Daniel and his three companions. When informed that he must die, Daniel asked for time, and in answer to prayer he received a revelation from God which enabled him to comply with the king's demand. He related to the king his dream and then explained its significance. His

life was not only spared, but he was loaded with honors. He became a great man, was given great gifts and was appointed to two officers—governor of the province of Babylon and head of the wise men, or magicians, of Babylon. By the consent of the king the duties of the former office

were delegated to his three companions, Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. This placed them close to the king and made any disregard of the king's wishes on their part very conspicuous. This explains how it was that they, and not Daniel also, were the objects of the king's wrath, as described in this lesson.

LESSON INTRODUCTORY.

The length of time from their promotion is not indicated, but some time later Nebuchadnezzar made a colossal image of gold and placed it near to Babylon. He next summoned before it all of his rulers and officers and had proclaimed to them by herald that all were expected to bow in worship before this image at the signal given by the musical instruments. Refusal to comply with this command was to be punished with death by burning. The severity of the punishment led all to yield formal obedience at least, except the three Jews, whose religion forbade such worship and whose faithfulness was too great to permit any breach of its laws. In an atmosphere such as existed in the court of Nebuchadnezzar there would be much jealousy among the officers. This breach of discipline was speedily reported to the king and he summoned before him the three officers who had refused to bow down and worship his image.

Nebuchadnezzar's Image. The material of which the image was made is said to be gold, but when its enormous size is taken into consideration it is evident that it is almost inconceivable that it was of solid gold. It was ninety feet in height and nine feet in breadth. This

may include the pedestal on which the image was placed, so that the image would be comparatively smaller in size; or even if these dimensions were of the image only, it may have been hollow, so that the amount of the precious metal required was not inconceivable.

It is evident from its description that this image was a new god added to the Babylon pantheon. This is evident from the royal decree commanding its worship and the severe penalty imposed upon those who refused. No explanation is given as to what god it represented. It is described merely as "the image which Nebuchadnezzar set up." It was, however, in all probability an image of Nebuchadnezzar himself. This would explain his anxiety to have it universally worshiped, and his rage at the disobedience to his command. Despotic rulers not infrequently set up a worship of themselves and construed neglect of such worship as disloyalty and treason. The Roman emperors from Augustus down were worshiped as gods, and Caligula came near beginning a war of extermination against the Jews because they refused to worship his image. Some inscriptions of the Assyrian monarchs tell how these kings made images of their "magnified royalty."

EXPLANATORY.

Verse 13. Rage and fury: The two synonyms are used to express the violence of the king's anger. He regarded this as a personal affront to himself.

14. Is it of purpose? etc.: Nebuchad-

nezzar here appears in more favorable light than elsewhere, for he makes inquiry as to whether it is possible to put a favorable construction upon their absence. He probably suspected the

13 Then Nebuchadnezzar in *his* rage and fury commanded to bring Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. Then they brought these men before the king. 14 Nebuchadnezzar answered and said unto them, Is it of purpose, O Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, that ye serve not my god, or worship the golden image which I have set up? 15 Now if ye be ready that at what time ye hear the sound of the cornet, flute, harp, sackbut, psaltery, and dulcimer, and all kinds of music, ye fall down and worship the image which I have made, *well*: but if ye wor-

ship not, ye shall be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace; and who is that god that shall deliver you out of my hands? 16 Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego answered and said to the king, O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer thee in this matter. 17 If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the burning fiery furnace; and he will deliver us out of thy hand, O king. 18 But if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image which thou hast set up.

accusers of having envious motives. Serve not my god nor worship the golden image: The golden image was of the royalty of Nebuchadnezzar. It would be, according to the analogy of other images, dedicated to the chief god of the Babylonians and inscribed with his name. Hence the worship of the image was worship of that god and of the king.

15. Now if ye be ready, etc.: The king was moved to extend them another opportunity of worshiping, probably out of regard for them and Daniel, all of whom had up to this time appeared in most favorable light. He probably expected immediate and unhesitating compliance with his demand. Prudence would prompt them to do so, for refusal meant a horrible death, and in all probability Nebuchadnezzar could not understand martyrdom for conscience sake. The king likewise felt that gratitude would prompt them to worship his image, for he had exalted them to their present offices; and he was accustomed to fulsome flattery. Who is that God? etc.: These were not words of inquiry, but of defiance and scorn. He has forgotten all of the impression which Daniel's interpretation of his dream had made on him (2:45).

16. We have no need to answer thee: It is not necessary for us to give you answer in this matter, for our God will answer you for us. Their attitude thus was trust in God, whom they believed to be superior to the god of Nebuchadnezzar.

17. If it be so, etc.: If your threat is carried out and we are cast into the fiery furnace. Is able . . . he will: If the worst that the king threatened comes to pass and God gives the answer for them they are confident (1) of his ability to deliver them and (2) of the certainty of his deliverance. In this language there is clearly and positively set forth, though without any offensive defiance of the king, the fact that they believe him inferior to the God whom they worship.

18. But if not, etc.: Here they assume, possibly for argument's sake, that the worst may befall them and that God should be unwilling to deliver them because of some fault which he found in them. This possibility, they affirm, will not induce them to worship the image. "In the most extreme event they prefer death to idolatry." Their language, to the effect that God is able to deliver them, is quite positive, so we may scarcely suppose that they had any misgivings in this respect.

19 Then was Nebuchadnezzar full of fury, and the form of his visage was changed against Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego: *therefore* he spake, and commanded that they should heat the furnace seven times more than it was wont to be heated. 20 And he commanded certain mighty men that were in his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, *and* to cast them into the burning fiery furnace. 21 Then these men were bound in their breeches, their tunics, and their mantles, and their *other* garments, and were cast into the midst of the burning fiery furnace. 22 Therefore because the king's commandment was urgent, and

the furnace exceeding hot, the flame of the fire slew those men that took up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. 23 And these three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, fell down bound into the midst of the burning fiery furnace.

24 Then Nebuchadnezzar the king was astonished, and rose up in haste: he spake and said unto his counsellors, Did not we cast three men bound into the midst of the fire? They answered and said unto the king, True, O king. 25 He answered and said, Lo, I see four men loose, walking in the midst of the fire, and they have no hurt; and the aspect of the fourth is like a son of the gods. 26 Then Nebu-

19. Full of fury: Because their language indicated that in their esteem he and his gods occupied at least the second place in importance. The form of his visage was changed: He had previously regarded them with favor. Now he looks upon them with dislike. Seven times more: The number seven is here to be taken, as elsewhere, to denote completeness. Hence one of the early Greek scholars paraphrases it *up to the limit*.

20. Certain mighty men that were in his army: Selection was made from the army because "the task was not without danger, and would require the services of especially trustworthy men."

21. Bound in the breeches: This may be because of the haste with which the king's orders were carried out, or because their garments were of inflammable material. The three garments specified were probably their official robes, and the "other garments" such as would be worn by all classes. The dress of Babylonians is fully described by Herodotus and pictured on the monuments.

22. Slew those men: "Since the three fell down (v. 23), it is probable that the furnace had a mouth above, through

which the victims could be cast into it. When heated to an ordinary degree, this could be done without danger to the men who performed this service; but in the present case the heat of the fire was so great that the servants themselves perished by it. The circumstance is also mentioned to show the greatness of the miracle by which the three were preserved unhurt in the midst of the furnace." (Keil.)

24. Was astonished and rose up: As king, he was seated, and his chair seems to have been opposite the side door of the furnace, though on account of the heat at some distance removed. This enabled him to see the inside of the furnace.

25. A son of the gods: Nebuchadnezzar speaks from his heathen point of view. Later this fourth being is described as an angel. This was from the Jewish point of view.

26. The Most High God: It must not be understood that Nebuchadnezzar believed the God of the Jews to be the only God or that he intends to pay him worship. He has just received a remarkable demonstration of his greatness, and therefore admits that he is greater than other gods.

chadnezzar came near to the mouth of the burning fiery furnace: he spake, and said, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, ye servants of the Most High God, come forth, and come hither. Then Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego came forth out of the midst of the fire. 27 And the satraps, the deputies, and the governors, and the king's counsellors, being gathered together, saw these men, that the fire had no power upon their bodies, nor was the

hair of their head singed, neither were their breeches changed, nor had the smell of fire passed on them.

28 Nebuchadnezzar spake and said, Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who hath sent his angel, and delivered his servants that trusted in him, and have changed the king's word, and have yielded their bodies, that they might not serve nor worship any god, except their own God.

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27. Saw these men: It was the verdict of all the assembly that they were unhurt and unchanged by the fire.

28. This verse contains a Doxology

which is followed by a decree (v. 29). The Doxology admits the divine protection extended his servants and the superiority of the God of the three.

COMMENTS.

The First Lesson. The primary purpose of the narrative is to teach the lesson and demonstrate the truth that Jehovah, the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, is greater than other gods, and that he is indeed the only true God. The Jewish nation had great need of this lesson. They were being punished by captivity for disbelief of this, the fundamental truth of their religion. There was danger that they would be swallowed up in the sea of heathendom if they continued in disbelief of this. The heathen world and especially the Babylonian nation was also in need of this lesson. In the arrogance of their power they were exalting their own gods in seeming ignorance and in utter disregard of the power of a greater one. One of the purposes of the entire book of Daniel, and the main purpose of this chapter, is to meet this need of Jew and Gentile. To the king and his court was demonstrated by the deliverance of the three that he was supreme over the gods of the Babylonians. The incident was closed by the decree of the king "that every people, nation and language which speak any-

thing amiss against the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego shall be cut in pieces and their houses shall be made a dung-hill; because there is no other god that is able to deliver after this sort."

The Second Lesson: The second lesson to be derived from this narrative is that of faithfulness to God and steadfastness in hours of trial and persecution. The Jews were in need of this lesson likewise. Many of them were now compelled to live in the midst of heathen surroundings. The example and the ridicule of the idolatrous would constantly tempt them to be lukewarm in their worship to God, if not actually apostates from him. These three had all the motives that others could have and more for not worshiping Jehovah. Prudence would prompt them to worship the image. Expediency urged them to bow down before it. They were under personal obligations to Nebuchadnezzar. They would seem to be singular and uncongenial if they alone refrain from worship, and then refusal meant imminent peril to their lives. But notwithstanding all of these motives for worshiping the image, they refused to

sackbut, psaltry, dulcimer (or bagpipe, as the margin says) and "all kinds" of music were to sound the call. The command was to "peoples, nations and languages." There must be no failure to obey. It was a method of compulsion. Whether the people desired to fall down before the image or not, they were commanded to do so under the terrible threat that if they should refuse they should be cast the same hour into the midst of a burning fiery furnace.

But there was an unexpected disregard of the program on the part of three very prominent officials in the kingdom. Certain native Chaldeans had kept their eyes open wide enough to see that Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego did not fall down at the signal of music. Probably they were jealous of the popular and gifted Hebrews. It was natural that they should not like the foreigners. So they were prompt to bring an accusation to the king against them. They came to him and began with: "O king, live forever," and then reminded him of his decree as to the worship of the image and the terrible penalty for disobedience. Then they called the names of the three God-fearing men who had dared to disobey the great Nebuchadnezzar. The king was exceedingly mad. I don't suppose he tried hard at any time to restrain his anger, and on this provocation he was filled with "rage and fury." He commanded that they should be brought into his presence. No sin was more hated by the sovereign than disobedience to his commandments. He asked them if it was really their "purpose" not to worship his god or how to the image he had set up.

Then he offered them a second chance to conform to his wishes. If still they should refuse they should be cast into the midst of the fiery furnace. He asked triumphantly: "And who is the god that shall deliver you out of my hands?"

The calm response of the men indicated their faith: "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have

no need to answer thee in this matter. If it be so, our God whom we serve is able to deliver us, and he will deliver us, out of thy hands, O king. But, if not, be it known unto thee, O king, that we will not serve thy gods, nor worship the golden image."

They were not worried over the situation. They trusted in the living God. But the king was so angry that his deepening fury showed in his countenance. The order was immediately given to heat the furnace "seven times more than it was wont to be heated." The second order was for mighty men of his army to bind the offenders and cast them into the furnace. The thing was quickly done. The king was extremely urgent. The rebels fell down into the midst of the glowing heat and enveloping flames.

Then came the opportunity of their God to deliver them. The king had a terrible vision. He saw not three men only, but four in the furnace. They were unbound; walking in the heat of the furnace and unhurt. The three he recognized as those whom he had condemned to perish. But the fourth looked glorious as a son of the gods. The king crept near to the furnace, and in fear, no longer in anger, called, saying: "Ye servants of the Most High God, come forth and come hither." All the governors, counsellors and deputies saw the men and saw they were unhurt. Not a hair of anyone's head was singed; not a sign of the flames could be found upon their clothing, and not even "the smell of fire had passed on them."

Nebuchadnezzar blessed the God of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, who had sent his angel and delivered his servants that trusted in him, that changed the king's word and yielded their bodies that they might not worship any God but their own God.

Therefore the king made a decree that any who spoke against the God thus able to deliver should be cut in pieces. Thus

the three faithful men of God let their light shine in a dark place and gave to

all coming ages a splendid example of faith.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What purposefulness of heart was shown by Daniel and his friends?

2. How did Daniel proceed to make it practicable for him to fulfill his purpose not to defile himself with the king's meat?

3. What was the result of the experiment which he and his companions were permitted to make with reference to their food and drink?

4. What gifts did God bestow upon the four and what additional one upon Daniel that afterward brought him great distinction?

5. What missionary benefit arose out of the deportation of the Jews to Babylon?

6. Why or wherein is this lesson a just and practical one on temperance?

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. Describe the image which Nebuchadnezzar made and set up. Dan. 3:1.

2. Whom did the king call to the dedication of the image? Dan. 3:2.

3. What response was made on the part of those invited? Dan. 3:3.

4. What announcement was made by the herald, as a command? Dan. 3:4, 5.

5. What penalty was inflicted upon the disobedient? Dan. 3:6.

6. What was the signal for worship, and who obeyed it? Dan. 3:7.

7. Who were accused of non-conformity? How and by whom accused? Dan. 3:8-11.

8. To what had they been appointed by the king of Babylon? Dan. 3:12.

9. What, then, was the temper and what the action of the king? Dan. 3:13-15.

10. What answer did the three young men return to the king? Dan. 3:16-18.

11. What three instructive points are

found in their answer? Dan. 3:16-18.

12. What further is said about the subsequent temper and action of the king, Nebuchadnezzar? Dan. 3:19, 20.

13. What was done to the three young men before they were cast into the furnace? Dan. 3:20, 21.

14. What did Nebuchadnezzar say to his counsellors? Dan. 3:24, 25.

15. What particularly impressed the king as to the number of men he saw and as to the appearance of the fourth? Dan. 3:25.

16. What, then, did Nebuchadnezzar himself do? Dan. 3:26.

17. To whom was the sight of the deliverance of these men granted? Dan. 3:27.

18. What did the king say of the God who delivered them? Dan. 3:28.

19. What decrees did the king make concerning their God? Dan. 3:29.

20. What favor did the king bestow upon the young men? Dan. 3:30.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. What is taught with reference to the glory of the kingdoms of this world in the account of the third item in the wilderness temptation of our Lord? (Matt. 4:8-10.)

2. What should be the attitude of Christians with reference to the spirit of worldliness about them? (James 4:4.) Worldliness is spiritual adultery.

3. What two clear and definite reasons does the apostle John give why Christians should not love the world—should not delight in the desires of the flesh, the lust of the eyes and the vainglory of life? (1 John 2:15-17.)

4. Note that by worldliness is not meant the natural globe, with its grass and beautiful flowers; nor the people of

the world whom Christ loves, and whom we also should love and seek to save, but the spirit of the world—the spirit that worketh in the children of disobedience.

5. These "Hebrew children" would not defile themselves with idolatrous feasts and likewise would not fall down to idolatrous images according to the custom and style of the country. They realized the great principle at stake. They were willing to "be conspicuous," to be regarded as "very peculiar," "to stand alone"; to be a "gazing-stock," to suffer "the reproach of Christ," and to burn in a furnace rather than be untrue and ungrateful to the God of heaven.

Such courage we find in its completest manifestation in Christ and in his heroic followers. Would that we could always be sure of such a spirit in the young

people of the churches in our own day!

6. One of the most graphic and thrilling touches in this wonderful picture of man's faithfulness and God's protection is the vision of the fourth person in the company of the three. "Where two or three are gathered together in my name," said Jesus, "there am I in their midst." He is "the same yesterday, today and forever." "He will never leave thee, nor forsake thee!" "Lo! I am with you all the days, even unto the end of the age."

7. Not only were the three protected and delivered. The king was convicted and changed by their example and by the testimony of the living God to their heroic faithfulness. Wonderful missionaries were these youthful servants of the living and loving Father!

Lesson XIII.

September 24.

DANIEL IN THE LIONS' DEN.

Daniel 6. (Print 10-23.)

GOLDEN TEXT—The angel of Jehovah encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them. Ps. 34:7.

Memory Verses—21-23. **Time**—539 B. C. **Persons**—Daniel, Darius and officers of the kingdom.

DAILY READINGS.

Sept. 18....	M—Dan. 6:1-28—Daniel in the Lions' Den.
Sept. 19...	T—Heb. 11:32-40—"Stopped the Mouths of Lions."
Sept. 20....	W—Dan. 3:1-30—Quenched the Power of Fire.
Sept. 21...	T—Ex. 12:21-35—The Might of Pharaoh Vanquished.
Sept. 22...	F—Ex. 14:10-31—"Thus the Lord Saved Israel."
Sept. 23....	S—2 Kings 19:14-37—Saving the Israelites from Sennacherib.
Sept. 24...	S—2 Chron. 20:5-30—"Ye Shall not Need to Fight."

HISTORICAL CONNECTIONS.

Nebuchadnezzar was king at the time of the last lesson and continued to reign for forty-four years, or till the year 561 B. C. Jeremiah had predicted that the universal sway which he exercised should be continued under his son and his son's son (Jer. 27:7). In fulfillment of this prophecy he was succeeded by Evil-Merodach, and he, after a reign of two years, by his brother-in-law, Neriglissar. On his death, after a reign of three years, his infant child was put on the throne, but was soon slain, and for seventeen years the ruler of Babylon was Nabonadius, who did not belong to the royal family. To give security to himself in his

position he associated with him in the government his son, Belshazzar, whose mother belonged to the family of Nebuchadnezzar. The latter was a mere figure-head, while Nabonadius was an astute ruler and a skillful warrior. He was unable, however, to defend Babylon from destruction, for he was defeated in the open field by Cyrus, and Babylon was captured from his son Belshazzar. A new ruler and a new race became dominant in Babylon. Daniel calls the new ruler Darius the Mede. The prophet had lived through all of these changes and was elevated by the new ruler to the position of one of the three presidents of the one hundred and twenty satraps.

DARIUS THE MEDE.

The identification of this king with any known person, or even the finding a place for his reign between that of the last Chaldean monarch and that of Cyrus the Persian, is one of the unsolved historical problems of the book of Daniel. None of the ancient historians of this period seem to know of any ruler between

the capture of Babylon and the rule of Cyrus, but on this point Daniel is quite explicit. Not only are they silent, but their language and the length of time assigned by them to each ruler seems actually to exclude the possibility of an independent rule prior to the accession of Cyrus. This question has tested

the ingenuity of many scholars. Many theories have been advanced, but the literature is too vast for a survey of all of them within a reasonable compass. Two only seem to be worthy of mention, and the limits of space forbid more than a statement of the theories. The first one is quite ancient and is supported by the statements of Josephus and Xenophon. "According to these historians Cyrus conquered Babylon for his father-in-law Cyaxares II, the son of Astyages, and did not come to the throne of Babylon as an independent prince till after his death. Josephus mentions that Darius was known to the Greeks by another name; and this it has been concluded, was, 'Cyaxares,' the name given to him by Xenophon. This identification is apparently supported by the indication in Daniel (5:31, 6:28), that first of all a Median and then a Persian dynasty succeeded the Babylonian. And it agrees with the age attributed to Darius by the prophet.

"From Xenophon it appears that he was an old man at the time of the capture of the city, too old to have an heir. When he gave his daughter in marriage to Cyrus, and with her Media as a dowry, he observed that he had no son born in marriage." (Bible Commentary.)

According to the other theory Darius the Mede is identical with Gobryas, the viceroy of Cyrus. "The passage in Daniel 5:31, where he is described as having re-

ceived the kingdom (Revised version), leads one to ask whether, in spite of the title of king which is given to him (6:67) he may not have been really governor only. In the Greek historians and in the Bab. Chronicle the name of Darius the Mede does not occur. He who preceded Cyrus to Babylon, on the occasion of the siege and capture of the city, being Gobryas, who may thus be regarded as having received the kingdom for him. Gobryas, like Darius the Mede (6:1) appointed governors in Babylon, and seems to have been in the attack which resulted in Belshazzar's death. It will thus be seen that Cyrus gave great power to Gobryas, who was in fact his viceroy. Apparently, therefore, the later Jewish writers looked upon Gobryas as having as much authority as Belshazzar, whom they regarded likewise as king, though he does not appear ever to have reigned. The confusion of the names of Darius the Mede and Gobryas of Gutium (he being governor of that place, which is regarded as having included a part of Media), may have been due to the scribes, who, being more familiar with the Greek form of the name of Darius (the end of which, when carelessly pronounced, bears a certain resemblance to that of Bobryas in that language) than with the Hebrew form Daryawesh, wrote one name for the other; and there is also the possibility that one of Gobryas' names was Darius, which would account for the mistake." (A. Pinches.)

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

Daniel discharged his new office of president of the satraps with ability and was soon elevated above his colleagues. This aroused the jealousy of the others, but his official actions were above reproach and it was impossible for them to bring any charge of wrong doing against him which would not immediately break down. They

perceived that the only possible point of attack was his religious actions. They appealed to Darius, therefore, and asked him to issue a decree to the effect that no prayer nor petition should be addressed to any god or man for thirty days except to the king only. Darius walked into the snare that was set to capture his faithful officer and the decree was issued.

10 And when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house (now his windows were open in his chamber toward Jerusalem); and he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime. 11 Then these men assembled together, and found Daniel making petition and supplication before his God. 12 Then they came near, and spake before the king concerning the king's interdict: Hast thou not signed an interdict, that every man that shall

make petition unto any god or man within thirty days, save unto thee, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions? The king answered and said, The thing is true, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. 13 Then answered they and said before the king, That Daniel, who is of the children of the captivity of Judah, regardeth not thee, O king, nor the interdict that thou hast signed, but maketh his petition three times a day. 14 Then the king, when he heard these words, was sore displeased,

EXPLANATORY.

10. Daniel knew: This shows that Daniel acted with deliberation and purpose in disobeying the decree. **His windows were open in his chamber:** The chamber was in the upper part of the house, or possibly on the roof, and on account of being more removed and less liable to be disturbed, was better adapted to devotion. The open window, in contrast to the closed window (Ez.40:16), was not covered with lattice work. **Toward Jerusalem:** Because, according to the ancient custom, the face of the worshiper must be turned towards the temple; for as in Jerusalem the suppliant turned towards the sanctuary (Ps. 5:8; 28:2), so he turned when abroad towards the holy city. This was the case long prior to the Captivity. See 1 Kings 8:33, 35, 38, 44, 48; 2 Chron. 6:29. The Mohammedans turn toward the holy city Mecca. **As he did aforetime:** Daniel did not act recklessly or imprudently. He did not seek a position which would expose him to danger. "Daniel offered prayer, not to make an outward show, for only secret spies could observe him while so engaged. Because he always did thus, he continued to do it." (Keil.)

11. These Men: The presidents and satraps (v. 4). There is abundant proof

that the spy system was well organized among the Medo-Persians, but in this case the conspirators rushed into his chamber (this is the meaning of the word translated *assembled*, and caught him in the act. No doubt they made sure of this beforehand by spying upon him from a higher house or by hearing him from the street.

12. Save unto thee, O king: By this proposal the courtiers had flattered the king. It was a species of monarch-worship such as Nebuchadnezzar sought to establish. **Which altereth not:** "According to the law of the united Medo-Persian realm, every official edict from the king, issued with certain formalities, possessed enduring force as law, hence was not subject to change."

13. That Daniel, etc.: The accusers do not mention Daniel's official position, but were very careful to call attention to his foreign origin. They also seek to convince the king that Daniel's act was a personal affront to him.

14. Was sore displeased: He now saw for the first time the intent of this proposal to him. They failed in arousing his ill will against Daniel, but the peculiarity of the Medo-Persian law which rendered it irrevocable, put both the

and set his heart on Daniel to deliver him; and he labored till the going down of the sun to rescue him. 15 Then these men assembled together unto the king, and said unto the king, Know, O king, that it is a law of the Medes and Persians, that no interdict nor statute which the king establisheth may be changed.

16 Then the king commanded, and they brought Daniel, and cast him into the den of lions. Now the king spake and said unto Daniel, Thy God whom thou servest continually, he will deliver thee. 17 And a stone was brought, and laid upon the mouth of the den; and the king sealed it with his own signet, and with the sig-

net of his lords; that nothing might be changed concerning Daniel. 18 Then the king went to his palace, and passed the night fasting; neither were instruments of music brought before him: and his sleep fled from him.

19 Then the king arose very early in the morning, and went in haste unto the den of lions. 20 And when he came near unto the den to Daniel, he cried with a lamentable voice; the king spake and said to Daniel, O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions? 21 Then said Daniel unto the king, O king, live for ever. 22 My God

king and Daniel at the mercy of the courtiers. Labored till the going down of the sun to rescue him: The king was anxious to secure Daniel's release, but what really hindered was his own lack of courage. The immutability of the law of the Medes and Persians was a fact to restrain the king or not, just so far as he was willing to be bound by it. A strong-minded ruler could always find a way to escape from its grasp. Cambyes wished to marry his sister. The law forbade. A law was unearthed which permitted the king to do as he pleased. Darius' weakness was like that of Herod (Matt. 14:9) or of Pilate (Matt. 27:24).

15. Then these men assembled, etc.: They came back to insist that he should act according to his decree. The theory of the law was that the king was divine, infallible and unchangeable, and hence they could urge that such delay as he was guilty of was unworthy of him.

16. Thy God . . . will deliver thee: This was probably more of a wish or a prayer than a confident belief that Daniel should escape, though the sequel shows that Darius had a measure of faith. The king does not have the courage to

act, and so he throws the responsibility upon God.

17. The king sealed it, etc.: Both parties sealed it. The king probably did this to protect Daniel against any violent assault, since he still believed in the possibility of his escape, and the officers to prevent the king from having him released.

18. Passed the night fasting, etc.: The mind of the king was disturbed. Nothing could divert his thoughts from the prisoner in the lions' den.

19. The king arose early: His early rising and his haste in going to the den show that he had some hope that God would deliver his servant.

20. The living God: Before the king knows whether God has protected Daniel he calls him by this title. His own religion would aid him to this belief, for he was a worshiper of Ormazd, whose name means "the great giver of life" or "the living creator of all." The Persians and Jews came to believe that there was an affinity between their religions. It is not improbable that Daniel had informed the king concerning the God whom he worshipped.

22. Innocency was found in me, etc:

hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, and they have not hurt me; forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt. 23 Then was the king exceeding glad, and commanded

that they should take Daniel up out of the den. So Daniel was taken up out of the den, and no manner of hurt was found upon him, because he had trusted in his God.

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Daniel gives two reasons for his deliverance. The first was his innocency, the personal uprightness of his own life. The

second was that he had done no hurt before the king, that is, his official life had been above reproach.

COMMENTS.

The Three Lessons. The three lessons deduced from the deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego from the fiery furnace are taught by this narrative also. They are (1) the fundamental truths of the Jewish religion that Jehovah is the one and only true God, and hence superior to all the gods of the nations; (2) no trial or persecution should tempt a worshiper of God from faithfulness to him; (3) God will not forsake that servant of his who relies upon him in hours of need.

Constancy in Prayer. A further lesson which is taught by this narrative is duty of constancy in prayer. If ever a man was in a position which justified him in neglecting prayer, that man was Daniel. The terms of the decree forbade prayer for one month only, and after that time he might have resumed his devotions. Furthermore he was not required to pay worship to the king or any god. In this respect the decree was not as stringent as that passed by Nebuchadnezzar. But Daniel did not take advantage of the possible evasions. He never wavered. As he had done often times, so he continued.

Blamelessness of Life. Daniel was protected by God because of the purity of his life and the irreproachable character of his political career. This was the

reason which Daniel gave the king for his protection. The arm of God was extended to him in aid because of his innocency and because he had done no hurt to the king.

The Reproach of the King. "Daniel cast no severe reproach upon the king. Indeed the original rather expresses a genial and kindly feeling. Daniel 'talked with the king.' With beautiful modesty he ascribes his deliverance to God's own hand alone through his angel, and very properly asserts his innocence of any wrong in this manner." (Cowles.)

Regularity in Prayer. "Unless we fix certain hours in the day for prayer it easily slips from our memory; and, therefore, although Daniel was constant in pouring out prayers, yet he enjoined upon himself the customary rite of prostrating himself before God three times a day.

"It was necessary to testify before men his perseverance in the worship of God; to have altered his habit at all would have been partial abjuration, and proof of perfidious defection. God not only requires faith in the heart and the inward affections, but also the witness and confession of our piety." (Calvin.)

Three Times a Day. "The custom of praying three times a day, which is attested for the first time in this passage, and which, according to the Talmudic tradition, was first brought into general

use among the Jews by the 'men of the great synagogue,' appears to have taken shape during the Babylonian captivity among the Israelites. The fundamental general idea of this custom is already expressed in Psa. 45:18; but the desire to find a regular substitute for the morning and evening sacrifices, which were now interrupted, doubt-

less contributed towards originating the custom, since the Jews were accustomed from an early period to regard prayer as in itself a sacrifice with which God is pleased (Hos. 14:3; Psa. 41:17; 116:17, etc.), and especially since they associated it in their minds with the evening sacrifice" (Psa. 141:12, 1 Kings 18:36). (Lange.)

THE LESSON STORY.

It is not within my power to do justice to the sublime subject of this story. But let us look into the facts and their significance. Daniel was gifted above his companions. While God gave them all knowledge and skill in learning and wisdom, he gave Daniel special understanding in all visions and dreams. God was working in the center of the darkest heathenism and working through Daniel as a chosen instrument. Did the king dream of a great image, its head of gold, its breast and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of brass and its feet part of iron and part of clay? Did he see that image broken to pieces by a little stone cut out of the mountain without hands? Was he unable to recall the dream, except the distress it produced upon his mind? Daniel, through the Lord's illumination, recalled the dream and gave its meaning.

Did Nebuchadnezzar dream also of a tree, high as heaven, wide as the earth, with fair leaves and fruit enough for all men and shelter enough for all beasts and birds? Did he see a holy one from heaven descending to order its overthrow and destruction? Did he behold the stump of it bound about with brass and iron, in the tender grass? Daniel, through divine guidance and knowledge, made known its significance. Did Daniel tell the king that he, Nebuchadnezzar, was the great tree and that he should be cut down and should be turned out into the green fields to eat grass like an ox, until he should learn and acknowledge the

true God and serve him? All these wonders wrought the faithful seer whose name is more honored in Christendom than it was in the days of the Captivity.

Daniel urged the king to break off his sins by righteousness, to show kindness to the poor, if there might be a lengthening of his tranquillity. But the chastisement predicted fell upon the king as Daniel had declared. Out of it all, however, there came the humble acknowledgment on the part of the king that the Most High ruleth among the nations of the earth, for all his works are truth, his ways justice, and he brings abasement to the proud.

Did the wicked succeeding king, Belshazzar, make a great feast to a thousand of his lords and order the sacred vessels to be used in the revel—vessels brought from the temple of Jehovah in Jerusalem—and did he see the frightful hand writing his doom upon the wall? Daniel was the gifted interpreter of its meaning and boldly but tenderly told the proud, profane and hardened king its full significance. That night was Belshazzar slain.

Then Darius the Mede, sitting upon the throne, made Daniel one of his distinguished presidents. This same Daniel, because of the excellent spirit in him, soon distinguished himself above all his fellows. The king thought to place him "over the whole realm."

Jealousy and conspiracy are the bitter fruits of Daniel's exaltation. Daniel's enemies persuaded the king to make a decree against any man who within thir-

ty days should ask aught of any god or man except the king. They could find no fault or flaw in Daniel save in connection with his religion. To this they knew Daniel was loyal and steadfast. These conspirators persuaded the king to make and sign the decree. They did not dream that the cruel act would descend with crushing weight upon their own heads. The penalty was death by the teeth and jaws of hungry lions in their den.

When Daniel knew the king had signed the writing he prayed to Jehovah just as he was wont when no enemy, threat nor lion's teeth awaited him. The spies and conspirators, jealous of Daniel's high honor and wonderful gifts, hastened to the king with the story of their discovery that Daniel had violated the decree. Darius was exceedingly sorry. He admired and believed in Daniel. But the letter of the law must be obeyed. His was an example of obedience in the letter without the spirit. Daniel was cast to the rapacious brutes for slaughter. But the very

lions were friendly to him. They were in his presence, and in the presence of his angel, God's angel, as harmless as lambs in the fold. The king fasted and lamented through all the night. Early he hurried to the den, saying, "O Daniel, servant of the living God, is thy God, whom thou servest continually, able to deliver thee from the lions?"

Daniel quickly answered, "My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, and they have not hurt me."

Then was Darius exceedingly glad. God's servant was restored to his place. His enemies were destroyed by the same ravenous beasts. Darius made a decree "that men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel." So Daniel prospered in the days of Darius and also in the reign of Cyrus the Persian. It would seem that the work of God in Babylon, with the four faithful servants to do his bidding, was more successful than in Jerusalem in the midst of a nation nominally his, while in heart it went astray after idolatry and rebelled against the Lord.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. Who were Daniel's three companions and what was the unity among them?
2. With what specific gifts did God endow them and endow Daniel?
3. How did they compare with others brought before the king?
4. What was the forgotten dream of the king which Daniel interpreted?
5. After Daniel's reward, what did he

request for his companions? (Dan. 2:49.)

6. How were the three tested and threatened and how saved?

7. What effect did the deliverance of the three produce upon the king?

8. What was Nebuchadnezzar's dream of the tree and what Daniel's interpretation?

9. What was Daniel's interpretation of the writing at Belshazzar's banquet?

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. To what high position was Daniel appointed by king Darius? Dan. 6:1, 2. Dan. 6:3.
2. Why did Daniel become distinguished above the other two presidents?
3. Why do you think the other officers of the king hated Daniel? Dan. 6:4.

4. What did they conclude as to the only fault they could find in him? Dan. 6:5.

5. In what scheme did the other presidents and satraps unite? Dan. 6:6, 7.

6. What was the hook on which they hoped to catch president Daniel? Dan. 6:7.

7. What was the penalty for doing the thing interdicted? Dan. 6:7.
8. What was Daniel's conduct after he knew the king had signed the writing? Dan. 6:10.
9. What had been Daniel's habit previously in the matter of prayer? Dan. 6:10.
10. Who discovered Daniel's violation of the writing and reported it? Dan. 6:11.
11. Was the king displeased that Daniel had prayed to Jehovah or that he had been led to sign the writing? Dan. 6:14.

12. How did the enemies of Daniel hold the king to his decree? Dan. 6:15.
13. What expression of faith did the king utter to Daniel? Dan. 6:16.
14. What further showed the king's sympathy with Daniel? Dan. 6:18-20.
15. What was the king's question and what Daniel's answer? Dan. 6:20-22.
16. What was the feeling of the king at Daniel's answer? Dan. 6:23.
17. What did the king then command concerning Daniel's accusers? Dan. 6:24.
18. To what decree on the part of the king did this remarkable experience lead? Dan. 6:25-27.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. The missionary influence of Daniel and the other splendid young men upon the court and kingdom of Babylon was very striking. It is very instructive to read the declaration of faith first by Nebuchadnezzar, and second, by Darius. Darius said that men should tremble before the God of Daniel, for he is the living God, and his kingdom shall not be destroyed. The conviction that God was to be feared, as the living God and eternal king, was planted in the heart of heathenism through the instrumentality of Daniel and his friends. That God is one God, eternal and able to deliver, was a necessary revelation in the age of gross idolatries. Christ was the revelation of that one God. We are still to tremble and fear before the God of Daniel, before him who said, "He that hath seen me hath seen the Father," and to whom Thomas, believing, cried, "My Lord and my God!" The Old Testament should be read always in the brighter light of the New.

2. The miraculous incidents in the book of Daniel are such as would deeply impress a heathen people. Persons well trained in the principles of Christ do not need miracles. Miracles appeal to the ignorant and give wide publicity and great impressiveness to the

principles they set forth. But when the principles themselves are made real and dominant in one's life, he is no longer in need of a miracle. Miracles belong to the childhood of the race more than to its maturity in the spiritual life. The life of Christ, its power and beauty, is greater than any sign he wrought. The truth itself, incarnated in human character, is mightier than any single deed performed by a Christian man. Even the essential doctrine of the resurrection of Christ is mightiest and most effective in the lives of men and women who are indeed "risen with him." The miraculous character of the book of Daniel has been urged against it by some; but it would seem rather an excellent argument in its favor when we consider the moral lesson of each miracle and the character of the people in Babylon.

3. The Lord delivers now as truly as in the day of Daniel. Kings and peoples will praise him now as Darius praised him then, if his servants now will be as faithful as was Daniel. One's whole life is a providence. Godliness is so beautifying and potent in influence that through its exhibition multitudes are won to embrace it. The best epistles are the living epistles.

OUTLINES OF THE LESSONS FOR THIRD QUARTER, 1911.

Lesson 1. Isaiah's Prophecy Concerning Sennacherib.

1. *Hezekiah in Deep Distress.*

Goes to temple of the Lord.

Prays with whole heart.

Seeks God's will consistently.

Obtains valuable answer.

Piety is invaluable—safe.

2. *The Nations Rage and Kings Set Themselves against Jehovah* (Psa. 2: 1, 2).

The hope and boast of Assyria—vain.

Boast true against idolatrous nations.

Boast false and vain against Jehovah.

Assyria shall not enter city.

3. *The Great Value of a True Prophet.*

Isaiah the great statesmen-seer.

The representative of God's Word.

God will save and rule nations.

Jesus is the Prophet—Revealer of God.

4. *Hezekiah's Great Trial and Folly.*

"God left him to try him, that he might know all that was in his heart." 2 Chron. 32:31. Even the best of Judah's kings had sorrowful weaknesses. So have we. Isaiah told the king the result. Isa. 39:5-7. God preparing to remove Judah.

Lesson II. The Suffering Servant of Jehovah.

1. *Christ is Lord of the Old Testament.*

Jesus said the Scriptures testify of him.

John 5:39, 40; 1 Pet. 1:10, 11.

Beginning here Philip preached Jesus. Acts 8:35.

Jesus used Old Testament Prophecies concerning himself. Luke 24:27, 45-47.

2. *God Suffers Both With and For Men.*

Christ suffers in his Church for men.

Intercedes with groanings.

We should not grieve his Spirit.

Suffering servants are successful.

3. *The High Purpose of Sympathy and Suffering is to Bring Men to God.*

To bring to God is to rid of sin; to lead to service and heaven.

4. *The Church should Suffer.*

(1) Striving against sin;

(2) Sympathizing with sinners;

(3) Following Jesus.

5. *The Church, then, Must Triumph in Him.*

"They that suffer with him shall be glorified with him."

The world wants to see first the Church suffering in the name of Christ, and second, triumphing also in him.

Lesson III. Manasseh's Wickedness and Penitence.

1. *He was a Great Sinner.*

He had a good father; a reformed kingdom; great opportunities.

He scorned the good and introduced the vilest idolatries. He led Judah into great sin.

2. *God Permitted Him to Suffer.*

The king saw his failure; was deeply humbled; was disgraced and distressed. Suffering is a medicine for pride.

God makes even the wicked to serve his purposes for his children.

3. *Manasseh was Cured through Distress.*

His pride was humbled; his vision was clarified; he was led to repentance.

4. *He Brought forth Fruits Meet for Repentance.*

God, who knows all hearts, accepted him; he destroyed idols; established the true worship.

"There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repents."

Lesson IV. Josiah's Devotion to God.

1. *Early Piety Commended.*

Josiah sought God early. Quote Golden Text.

Jesus' example sufficient.

2. *The Age of Twelve.*

Jesus in the temple.

Josiah in vigorous reform.

Normal childhood was that of Jesus.

"Seek ye first the kingdom."

Children are sinners and need the Saviour. Sunday-school pupils ought to know early why and how they should obey Christ. Don't encourage delay—it is to disobey.

3. *A Steadfast Life in the Faith.*

How important is steadfastness! Read 1 Cor. 15:58. In view of the resurrection, "wherefore" be steadfast, abounding in the Lord.

"Present your bodies" to God.

No time allotted of God for the sowing of wild oats.

"Your reasonable service."

4. *It Takes a Whole Life to Develop Character.*

"In the morning sow thy seed. At evening hold not thy hand."

The only proper recognition of God's mercy and grace is a life completely rendered to his service.

Lesson V. *The Finding of the Book of the Law.*1. *Sad State when the Bible is Lost.*

The world is lost to many.

It may be lost, though present.

It is often lost in superstition.

It is lost through substitutes.

It is lost when not made practicable.

Though lost, it will be fulfilled.

2. *Great Enthusiasm in Finding it.*

One hope of the Church to-day is enthusiasm on account of the Word.

It is a very great treasure.

Let it have free course and be glorified.

Enthusiasm in studying it; teaching it; preaching it; carrying it to the heathen.

Luther found it. Campbell found it.

It must reach us; rule us; speak through us to others.

3. *It Must be Taken Seriously to One's Heart.*

It was not read for Josiah's entertainment.

It was not used for apt quotation only.

It was not simply for illumination.

It was for admonition, reproof, correction, that the man of God might be perfect.

The people must assemble to hear it.

A covenant to obey it must be made.

4. *How Blessed the Gospel above the Law!*

Law was for children, their schoolmaster to bring to Christ. We are under Christ. We must regulate ourselves by the principles of Christ. Our responsibility is greater than was that of Josiah, for greater are our opportunities.

Lesson VI. *Jeremiah Tried and Acquitted.*1. *A Faithful Preacher of a Faithful God.*
Intelligent; courageous; obedient; willing to suffer.2. *A Practical, Vital Message.*

"Thus saith the Lord."

"If ye will not walk in my law"—if not hear my prophets—then I'll make you "a curse" to all the nations.

3. *How the Message was Received.*

It made mad; led to violence; endangered the preacher's life.

Priests and prophets said Jeremiah was worthy of death—had spoken against the city.

He said: Jehovah sent me; told me what to say; amend your ways; obey and escape the evil.

4. *Verdict Reversed.*

"Not worthy of death." Two illustrations given. One of Micah; one of Uriah. 26:18-23.

Lesson VII. *Jehoiakim Burns the Prophet's Book.*1. *God Hates and Interferes with Sin.*

He provides prophets to teach and warn.

He warns parents and kings against sin.

He tells its terrible history.

Jesus came to destroy the power of sin.

2. *God Loves and Seeks to Save Sinners.*

He revealed his own holiness.

He tells the story of his love to men.

He permits chastisements to teach us.

He allows even captivity to instruct us.

He makes plain his desire to forgive, if men will repent and receive him.

3. *Many Go Madly, Blindly On to Ruin.*

Jehoiakim and his people had a chance.

The cut and burnt roll shows how fools receive admonition and warning.

To kill prophets does not stop God.

The Lord and his Church are your best friends. "Why will ye die?"

The land destroyed; no successor; dead body cast out; punishment.

4. *God's Word Indestructible.*

It has come down through the ages.

"The blood of martyrs is the seed of the Church." Jesus rose again.

"The word of the Lord endureth forever."

"This is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you." 1 Pet. 1:25.

Lesson VIII. *Jeremiah Cast Into Prison.*

1. *Sin Makes Sad the Message of God.*

God foretells disaster, not willingly.

Even the Gospel has its heavy shadows; it is the savor unto death for unrepentant.

Good news without repentance is bad news.

The Gospel is no better than the law if neglected.

The resurrection means nothing to them who will not rise from sin.

Jeremiah had been a cheerful prophet to an obedient or repentant nation.

2. *Many, Many Offers of Mercy had been Rejected by Judah and Jerusalem.*

God represents himself as rising up early and sending prophets to Judah. Jer. 26:5.

No door of repentance was kept open. It was impossible to renew to repentance.

Every mercy rejected is a millstone to destroy. "How often . . . but ye would not."

3. *God Never Compels; He Appeals to Motives.*

Sin blinds men; sin binds men; destroys men.

Let us rejoice for Christ as our motive.

"I can do all things through Christ."

Lesson IX. *Judah Carried Captive to Babylon.*

1. *The Long-Delayed Calamity Comes.*

Life is but a dream when past.

From childhood the way seems long.

From age to childhood, very short.

Though a world be long in making, it is finished at last.

We have spoken, prayed, read and sung of heaven.

Soon it shall appear.

For many years no death.

It came to us at last.

Things to which we looked forward we now look back upon.

To-morrows soon fade into yesterdays.

To-day we live and laugh.

To-morrow we weep and die.

2. *God's Warnings and Promises Seem Unreal.*

They shall all be fulfilled.

To be spiritual is to realize the future and unseen.

The joy before Jesus made the cross enduring.

Moses refused present pleasures for the future recompense.

Abraham looked for the city of God.

The patriarchs sought a country.

One day is with God as a thousand years, a thousand years as a day.

3. *Great was the Fall of Jerusalem.*

He that heareth and doeth not is like the foolish man who built on the sand; great was the fall.

The city of promises destroyed.
It slew the prophets and fell.

4. *Greater far is Captivity to Satan.*
Greater is the blinding of Satan than
that inflicted upon Zedekiah.
Outward bondage nothing compared
with inward.
Sin leads to the hopeless bondage of
the soul. Liberty in Christ.
The truth shall make you free.
Lord, save us from sin.
5. *Faithful Jeremiah Saved.*
God will provide for his own.
All things work for them.

Lesson X. Review.

Lesson XI. Daniel and His Companions.

1. *These were Young Men—Youths.*
Many excuses for the young.
These had a purpose in life.
The word of God was in them. 1 Jno.
2:14.
Young men needed now.
2. *Lived in a Wicked City.*
They must be the more righteous.
First of all, they feared God.
Not swayed by others.
They were not pleasure-seekers.
Their salt and light were needed.
3. *They Stood Together for Right.*
Companions in right.
They strengthened each the other.
So often companions are injurious.
4. *They Overcome the First Temptation.*
They had a principle at stake.
They were polite, but strong.
God was with them; helped them.
As yet not called to suffer.
They were temperate and godly.

Lesson XII. Three Boys in a Fiery Furnace.

1. *Sorely Tried by Popular Custom.*
They dared to be peculiar.
They dared to disobey the king.

They were brave enough to face death.
Everybody fell down but them.
Offered a second invitation.
Threatened with horrible death.

2. *They chose a Great Opportunity.*
God wanted missionaries.
They were in the heart of heathendom.
They were normal, godly boys.
Life to them was a mission.
Fine examples of faith.
3. *God is Looking for such Men.*
He wants vessels meet for use.
He wants reliable men.
He claims our childhood as well as age.
They instruct us.
They were successful.
Their heroism paid them richly.
A nation felt their faith.
A king was led to confession.

Lesson XIII. Daniel in the Lions' Den.

1. *Promotion Brings Trouble.*
No worldly honor without its disadvantages.
Jealousy fulfills its plan.
Great responsibility carries in it risk
and exposure.
2. *Selfish Schemes React in Disaster.*
Haman hanged upon his own gallows.
Schemers caught in their scheme.
Destroyers destroyed.
They that take the sword perish by the
sword.
They fell into the pit they digged.
3. *Even Foes See in Daniel but One Fault, which was his Chief Virtue.*
He was known as one who made God
first.
He was known as steadfast in his faith.
4. *God was Glorified.*
He was obeyed; he was made widely
known.

CLASS RECORD

Class No.

Teacher

[illegible]

ORDER OF EXERCISES.

By S. H. Reid. Superintendent Central Church Bible School, New
Albany, Ind.

Instrumental Music.

Opening Song.

Invocation and Lord's Prayer.

Responsive Reading. (One of the Psalms or other Scripture material; *never* the lesson for the day.)

Hymn.

Prayer. School standing.

Song.

Statement of the purpose of the lesson.

Recitation Period. (30 or 35 minutes.)

Instrumental Music for reassembling.

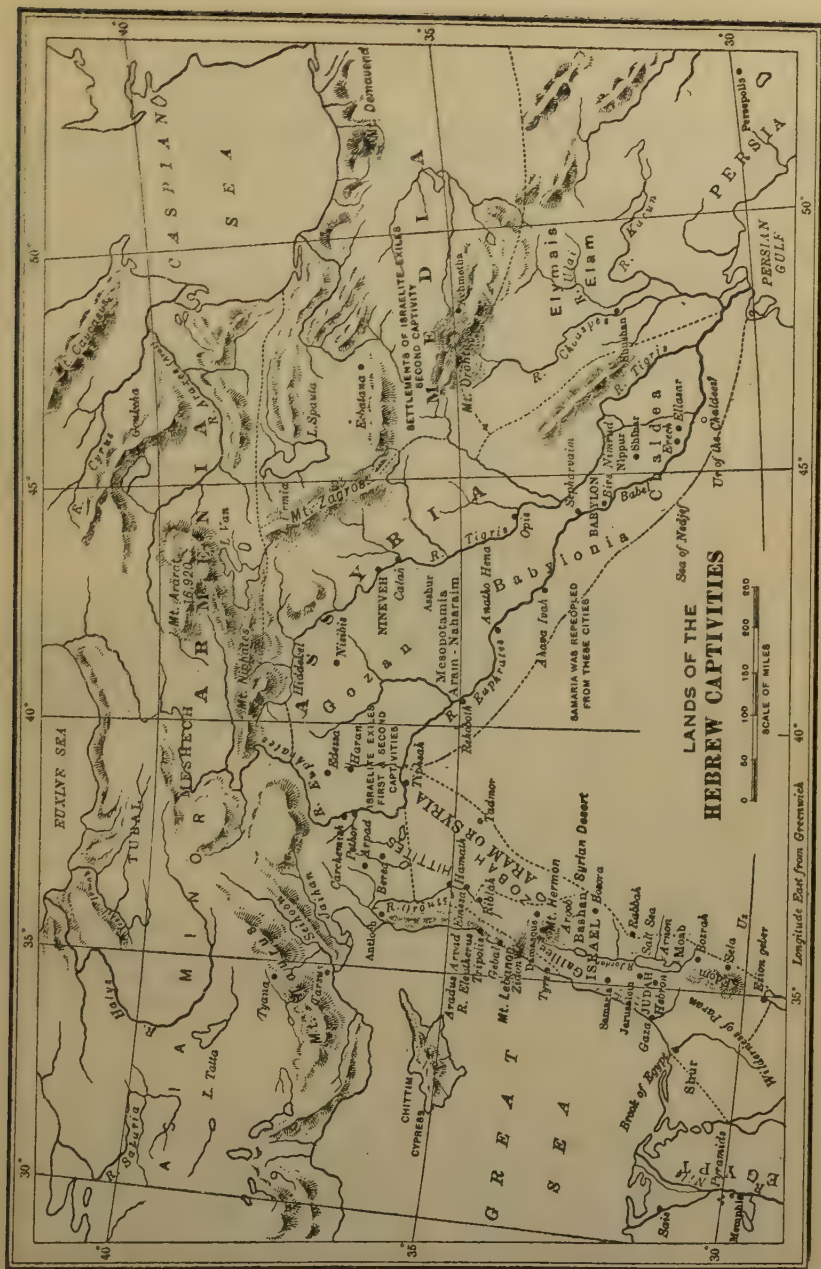
Birthday Offering for Missions.

Announcements.

Supplemental work, or recitation of a memory verse by the whole school.

Song.

Benediction. All the school seated.



1911—FOURTH QUARTER—1911

Lesson 1.

October 1.

THE PROPHET EZEKIEL A WATCHMAN.

Ezek. 3.

GOLDEN TEXT—Hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me.
Ezek. 3:17.

Memory Verses—17-19. **Suggested Reading**—Ezek. 2, 3, 33. **Time**—594 B. C.
Persons—Ezekiel, the living creatures, and the captives by the river Chebar. **Places**
Tel-abib and the river Chebar.

DAILY READINGS.

Sept. 25... M—Ezek. 3:1-27—The Prophet Ezekiel a Watchman.
Sept. 26 ... T—Ezek. 2:1-10—Speaking to a Rebellious House.
Sept. 27.... W—Ezek. 33:1-33—The Watchman's Duty and Responsibility.
Sept. 28... T—Ezek. 18:19-32—The Lord Ready to Forgive.
Sept. 29.... F—Isa. 21:1-12—The Watchman set by the Lord.
Sept. 30.... S—Acts 20:17-35—Example of Fidelity as a Watchman.
Oct. 1..... S—1 Cor. 9:16-27—Becoming All Things to All Men.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Tel-abib signifies hill of corn-ears, or corn-hill. It was probably some fertile spot near the river bank. Its location is otherwise unknown, nor is it possible to determine what was its size or outward circumferences. The mention of walls in Ezekiel 12:7 and 33:30 is not to be taken

as proof that it was walled, for the reference is probably to the walls of the houses. The river Chebar is not the same as the Chabor on which the exiles from Samaria were placed, but is some stream farther south in Babylonia proper. It may have been one of the canals connected with the Euphrates.

THE PROPHET EZEKIEL.

Ezekiel was the prophet of the exile. He was carried to Babylon from Jerusalem as one of the company which was deported with Jehoiachin in 597 B. C. All the members of this party belonged either to the nobility, the men of war or the craftsmen (2 Kings 24:14-16).

Ezekiel must have belonged to the first class, since he was certainly neither a warrior nor an artisan. He was a priest like the older prophet Jeremiah, and in all probability belonged to the higher order of priests. His familiarity with the details of the temple

12 Then the Spirit lifted me up, and I heard behind me the voice of a great

rushing, *saying*, Blessed be the glory of Jehovah from his place. 13 And I heard

service has led some to think that he had officiated as a priest in the sanctuary. In the opening of his book he gives the date as in the thirtieth year, and in the absence of anything more definite we may take this as the thirtieth year of his own life. He was at least not younger than this. He was married and had a home of his own. The captivity divided the Jews into two groups, one in Jerusalem and one in Babylonia. It was the expectation of their conquerors that this fact would weaken them and prevent

national development, but in this respect their expectations were not realized. Jerusalem quickly reorganized its fighting force and dared Babylon to a more sanguinary contest. The exiles succeeded in preserving, fostering and developing their national peculiarities under the eye of their conquerors. Ezekiel and Jeremiah shared in the opinion that the captives were superior to those who had remained at home, though they were far from free of idolatry. Ezekiel had been an exile five years when he entered upon his prophetic career.

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

The book of Ezekiel opens with an account of his call to his prophetic work. Like Isaiah, his call came to him in a vision of God, but the imagery of the vision is far more elaborate than in the case of the inaugural vision of Isaiah. He himself states that the vision was "the appearance of the likeness of the glory of Jehovah" (1:28). After the vision is past and Ezekiel lies prone upon the ground in awe, God speaks to him and gives him his charge. He was sent to the captives and was warned not to feel fear in their presence though they should not be submissive to the principles of God.

After the warning against sin the prophet's charge is brought to an end. He is then caused to eat a book, this signifying in the first place that all outward hindrance to his speaking was removed, and in the second that he was empowered with the gift of inspiration. Thus equipped he is dismissed to his task with a warning, however, not unlike that given to Isaiah with respect to the lack of outward and visible success which is to crown his efforts. "The house of Israel will not hearken unto thee; for they will not hearken unto me; for all the house of Israel are of a hard forehead and of a stiff heart."

EXPLANATORY.

12. Then: In the first chapter the prophet Ezekiel gives a description of the vision which appeared to him. It was of a throne attended and supported by four living creatures, and on the throne was one having the appearance of a man. This was God. When he spoke to the prophet he was filled with the spirit. Ezekiel was commanded to go and preach to the captives. Then the fact of his

inspiration is represented to the prophet in a symbolic way. A hand was outstretched to him bearing a book. This book was the word of God to the captives. Ezekiel was commanded to eat it. Thus the impression was conveyed to the prophet that he was full of the word of God and that it was his duty to speak it to the persons to whom he was sent. This which was symbolically conveyed to him

the noise of the wings of the living creatures as they touched one another, and the noise of the wheels beside them, even the noise of a great rushing. 14 So the Spirit lifted me up, and took me away; and I went in bitterness, in the heat of my spirit; and the hand of Jehovah was strong upon me. 15 Then I

came to them of the captivity at Tel-abib, that dwelt by the river Chebar, and to where they dwelt; and I sat there overwhelmed among them seven days.

16 And it came to pass at the end of seven days, that the word of Jehovah came unto me, saying, 17 Son of man, I have made thee a watchman unto the

is then expressed in words, and with the assurance that God will support him Ezekiel is sent to his task. **The spirit:** This is mentioned in 2:2, and it is there stated that the spirit took possession of him, filled him. It is the name for the power or energy which filled the prophet with strength. **Lifted me up:** This is not to be understood as a bodily transportation of the prophet upward, but an uplifting of his spirit away from his external surroundings. It was a part of the vision or trance. **I heard behind me:** In his thought it seemed to the prophet that he was lifted up and carried away from the throne which he had seen. Hence the voice which came from the vicinity of the throne sounded behind him. **The voice of a great rushing:** This comparison is used to describe the quality of the voice which he heard. He does not say who uttered the voice. **Blessed, etc.:** Words of praise and adoration addressed to Jehovah by the unknown speaker. Isaiah heard the seraphim crying, "Holy, Holy, Holy."

13. **The noise of the wings:** This was the sound made by the throne with its occupant departing. The vision is at an end through the Spirit remains with Ezekiel to instruct him. The noise was made by the wings of the living creatures and by the wheels. The throne was supported at each corner by a living creature and beside each was a wheel, but no mechanism, such as axles and steering gear, connected them. They operated without the need of any such device as these.

14. **The Spirit lifted me up and took**

me away: Under the impulse of the Spirit he went to his task. This clause states this fact from the standpoint of the Spirit's operation upon him, he *was taken*. The next clause and v. 15 state the same fact from the standpoint of Ezekiel's own personality; he *went to them of the captivity*. Both are true. Jesus was driven by the Spirit into the wilderness (Mark 1:12), and yet it was not contrary to his own will. **In bitterness, in the heat of my spirit:** The thought is that the prophet was lifted into sympathy with God and with him shares in the righteous indignation which he feels against Israel's sin. Jeremiah says, "I am full of the fury of the Lord," etc. (Jer. 6:11.) **The hand of Jehovah was strong upon me:** Jehovah strengthened him in his work.

15. **I sat there overwhelmed:** This expresses the strong emotion under which the prophet labored. Two strong feelings contend with each other in his breast—his righteous indignation and his sympathy with his people. Both would lead him to mourn, and so like the mourners he sat in silence (Lam. 3:28, Job. 2:13, Isa. 3:26). His grief was too great for noisy clamor like that of the hired mourners.

17. **Son of man:** This is the title by which God addresses Ezekiel. It is "in the book of Ezekiel no title of honor or distinction. It is precisely the opposite of this. It denotes the absence of distinction in the person of the prophet. It signifies no more than 'member of the human race; its sense might also be conveyed if we were to render it by the

house of Israel: therefore hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me. 18 When I say unto the wicked, Thou shalt surely die; and thou givest him not warning, nor speakest to warn the wicked from his wicked way, to save his life; the same wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thy hand. 19 Yet if thou warn the wicked, and he turn not from his wickedness nor from his wicked way, he shall die in his iniquity; but thou hast delivered thy soul. 20 Again, when

a righteous man doth turn from his righteousness, and commit iniquity, and I lay a stumblingblock before him, he shall die: because thou hast not given him warning, he shall die in his sin, and his righteous deeds which he hath done shall not be remembered; but his blood will I require at thy hand. 21 Nevertheless if thou warn the righteous man, that the righteous sin not, and he doth not sin, he shall surely live, because he took warning; and thou hast delivered thy soul.

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word 'mortal.' It expresses the infinite contrast between the heavenly and the earthly, between the glorious Being who speaks from the throne and the frail creature who needs to be supernaturally strengthened before he can stand upright in the attitude of service." (Skinner.) **A watchman:** "The appointment of Ezekiel as a watchman was not a change upon his original appointment as prophet (2:5), it is only a more precise definition of it. The term which had already been used by Jeremiah (6:17) expresses the duties and part of a prophet of this age. . . . The fall of Jerusalem was a certainty. And his true place was in the midst of a people whom this great calamity had overtaken." (Davidson.) The duties of a watchman were two, (1) to observe and (2) to warn. The idea of a watchman implied danger, and it was his part to guide the souls of the people safely through this danger.

18. When I say unto the wicked, etc.: When the watchman perceives danger coming it is his duty to give warning. When God makes a threat against the wicked it is the prophet's duty to give the wicked warning. If he fails to do so, the wicked man dies, but the responsi-

bility for his death falls upon the prophet. In his iniquity: Through his iniquity or because of his iniquity.

19. Thou hast delivered thy soul: By giving his warning the prophet escapes from the responsibility of the man's death.

20. I lay a stumblingblock before him: In accordance with the Old Testament usage, the stumblingblock, that is, the thing over which the man falls and perishes, is laid by God, though actually God tempts no man in order to bring about his destruction, but in his providence permits it. Cf. Jas. 1:13. When the stumblingblock lies in the way of the man who has sinned, it is the prophet's duty to give warning, otherwise, the man will stumble over it and fall and the prophet will be responsible.

21. And he doth not sin: The prophet's responsibility for the righteous is even greater than for the wicked. When he has warned the wicked, he has freed himself from blame. In the case of the righteous, however, he must guard him from sin, and he can never be sure that he has escaped responsibility till he sees that he has maintained his righteousness.

COMMENTS.

The Prophet's Call. "The call of a prophet and the vision of God which sometimes accompanied it are the two sides of one complex experience. The man who has truly seen God necessarily has a message to men. Not only are his spiritual perceptions quickened and all

consciousness of being chosen by God for a special work or a sense of moral responsibility for the faithful declaration of his truth. Whether, as with Isaiah and Ezekiel, the call springs out of the vision of God, or whether, as with Jeremiah, the call comes first and is supple-



LAND OF THE CAPTIVITY.

the powers of his being stirred to the highest activity, but there is laid on his conscience the burden of a sacred duty and a life-long vocation to the service of God and man. The true prophet, therefore, is one who can say with Paul, 'I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision,' for that can not be a real vision of God which does not demand obedience. And of the two elements the call is the one that is indispensable to the idea of a prophet. We can conceive a prophet without an ecstatic vision, but not without a

mented by experiences of a visionary kind, the essential fact in the prophet's initiation always is the conviction that from a certain period in his life the word of Jehovah came to him, and along with it the feeling of personal obligation to God for the discharge of a mission entrusted to him. While the vision merely serves to impress on the imagination by means of symbols a certain conception of God's being, and may be dispensed with when symbols are no longer the necessary vehicles of spiritual truth, the call,

as conveying a sense of one's true place in the kingdom of God, can never be wanting to any man who has a prophetic work to do for God amongst his fellow-men." (Skinner.)

The Character of the People. One of the difficulties of Ezekiel's task consisted in the fact that the people to whom he preached were spiritually dull and wicked. He calls them a rebellious house (v. 8). It is to be difficult to get his truths into their hearts, more difficult, in fact, than if he were speaking to a people of different language. Such a barrier would not be insurmountable, but it is not an intellectual barrier which separates him and his audience. It is moral and spiritual. They can understand his words, but because they dislike the truths which he utters, they will not hear them. But the prophet is not to allow the fruitlessness of his efforts to restrain him from speaking. He is to give them a "thus saith the Lord," whether they hear or whether they forbear. His task was similar to that of Isaiah in the fruitlessness of his efforts. (Cf. Isa. 6:11-12.)

The Responsibility of the Individual. (vs. 18-21.) In connection with these verses the fuller statement of the same truth in chapter 18 should be read. It was Ezekiel's distinctive contribution to truth. Each man is himself responsible to God for his own action. The wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him and the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him. The soul that sinneth, it shall die. Up to this time the prophets had delivered their messages to the nation. The principle of the solidarity of the nation ruled the message; but with the fall of Jerusalem the nation as a unit ceased to exist and Ezekiel is the first of the prophets to preach the gospel to the individual. Every Israelite must give an account of his own life to God, and the sins and mistakes of his father are not to be reckoned to his discredit. This doctrine met the needs of the age, for the exiles among whom Ezekiel lived were either attempt-

ing to shift the blame for their captivity or else were finding fault with God's providence by means of a saying which had grown into a proverb: "The fathers have eaten sour grapes and the children's teeth are set on edge." Ezekiel's doctrine of individual responsibility was a repudiation of this belief.

Ezekiel as a Watchman. The prophet is told to regard himself as a watchman. This duty he develops more in detail in 33:1-9. The responsibilities of such an office were great, though its duty was simple. The watchman of a city was to give public warning of the approach of an enemy. So long as his trumpet does not sound, the people go to sleep or to their daily duties. Their lives and property are in his hands. Should he sleep or neglect to give warning, wealth and lives are lost through his fault. Their blood is required at his hand. Should the watchman give the warning, but it should be disregarded and the man is cut down, his blood is upon his own head. An office is a trust and involves responsibility, and in a time of public danger no office was more responsible than that of watchman. It makes great difference to the watchman whether the warning of danger has been given or not. In one case it means freedom from blame, and in the other it means guilt charged to him. Ezekiel looked upon his prophetic office in exactly this way. If men must die, he could not prevent it, but this much he could do, he could free his soul from blame. This every prophet, preacher, and Christian may do by faithfully discharging his responsible duties.

The Modern Watchman. "There is nothing in Ezekiel's ministry that appeals more directly to the Christian conscience than the serious and profound sense of pastoral responsibility to which this passage bears witness. It is a feeling which would seem to be inseparable from the right discharge of the ministerial office. In this, as in many other respects, Ezekiel's experience is repeated, on a

higher level, in that of the apostle to the Gentiles, who could take his hearers to record that he was 'pure from the blood of all men,' inasmuch as he had 'taught them publicly and from house to house,' and, 'ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears' (Acts 20:17-35). That does not mean, of course, that a preacher is to occupy himself with nothing else than the personal salvation of his hearers. St. Paul would have been the last to agree to such a limitation of the range of his teaching. But it does mean that the salvation of men and women is the supreme end which the minister of Christ is to set before him, and that to which all other instruction is subordinated. And unless a man realizes that the truth he utters is of tremendous importance on the destiny of those to whom he speaks, he can hardly hope to approve himself as an ambassador for Christ. . . . Nevertheless it remains true that the great end of the gospel ministry is to reconcile men to God and to cultivate in individual

lives the fruits of the Spirit, so as at the last to present every man perfect in Christ. And the preacher who may be most safely entrusted with the handling of all other questions is he who is most intent on the formation of Christian character and most deeply conscious of his responsibility for the effect of his teaching on the eternal destiny of those to whom he ministers. What is called preaching to the age may certainly become a very poor and empty thing if it is forgotten that the age is made up of individuals each of whom has a soul to save or lose. What shall it profit a man if the preacher teaches him how to win the whole world and lose his own life? It is fashionable to hold up the prophets of Israel as models of all that a Christian minister ought to be. If that is true, prophecy must at least be allowed to speak the whole lesson; and among other elements Ezekiel's consciousness of responsibility for the individual life must receive due recognition." (Skinner.)

THE LESSON STORY.

Ezekiel was one of the four greatest prophets, the others being Isaiah, Jeremiah and Daniel. His ministry, which continued more than two decades, was among the Jewish exiles in Babylon. Carried into captivity at Nebuchadnezzar's first siege of Jerusalem, he had been an exile for five years when called to be a prophet. The first chapter gives an account of his wonderful vision which came to him in his thirtieth year. The place was on the river Chebar in Chaldaea. It was there that the heavens were opened and he saw visions of God. It was there that the word of Jehovah came expressly to him and there that the hand of the Lord was upon him. Overcome by the glorious vision and having fallen prostrate upon the ground he heard a voice calling him, "son of man" and bidding him arise. Strengthened by the

Spirit of the Almighty he stood upright and heard again the voice bidding him to speak the Lord's message to the children of Israel, whether they would or would not hear. If his warnings should be rejected his people should know at least that a prophet had been among them.

Against the opposition of the people he should set his face like a flint; and against their looks of anger, scorn or paralyzing indifference he should be as adamant. Being called, as a prophet, Ezekiel himself was warned against the sin of rebellion. His obedience was tested and the nature of his mission was impressed by his being commanded to eat that given to him. Looking, he saw an outstretched hand holding a book or roll written both within and without. This he was bidden to eat although the book was full of woes and lamentations. The

words of God having entered into his very heart and life were to be spoken to the people. They were sweet when understood. Uplifted by the Spirit and facing his hard and untried task, his spirit sank within him, and for days he sat among his people overwhelmed and dumb. But again the word of the Lord came to him and this time his mission was made clear.

He was to be a watchman unto the house of Israel. It should be his duty to warn the people of their danger, and if he failed to do so their blood was to be required at his hands.

There is something thrilling about a faithful watchman. He has the life of the city in his hands. If he see danger in any quarter, an enemy approaching, for example, he is supposed to awaken the people and tell them of the danger confronting them. If he give the alarm and the people take warning and defend themselves or escape, both he and they are benefited. If he see the sword coming and give not warning the people shall be taken away by the sword of the enemy, but their blood will the Lord require at the watchman's hand. The thirty-third chapter of Ezekiel is very graphic in its description of a watchman's responsibility. A preacher is, or should be, a true watchman. What a shepherd is to the sheep he guards by night from the attacks of wolves and robbers, the watchman is to the inhabitants of a city who trust him to warn them of danger.

God wanted a shepherd, or a watchman, for his exiled but beloved people in Babylon. He set Ezekiel to guard and warn them. His task was not an easy one. The people were very hard-hearted and rebellious. But he was made strong by the spirit of God for his duty.

"When the house of Israel dwelt in their own land, they defiled it by their own way." Ezekiel 36:17. Ezekiel must deal faithfully with his people concerning their sins. "Wherefore I poured my fury upon them, and I scattered them among the heathen, and they were dispersed through the countries. According to their way and according to their doings I judged them." Ezek. 26:18, 19. Ezekiel was to tell them and to make them understand the secret of their deep humiliation and suffering.

When God came to the time of their salvation he could say: "I do this for my holy name's sake." God would, as he said, sanctify his holy name "that was profaned among the heathen." How wonderfully our Saviour has sanctified that holy name! How precious the promise which the prophet was authorized to make to rebellious Israel: "I will take you from among the heathen, and gather you out of all countries and bring you into your own land!" But they must learn the truth sufficiently to be cured from idolatry into which they had so often fallen.

PELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. At what time and under what circumstances did Ezekiel prophesy? Ezek. 1:1, 2.

2. Into how many groups did the captivity divide the Jews; and what was the difference between the groups? 2 Kings 24:14-17. (See note on Ezekiel.)

3. What was the inaugural vision of Ezekiel in his call? Ezek. 1:26-28.

4. What was the effect of this vision upon the prophet? Ezek. 1:28—2:12.

5. To whom did Jehovah send Ezekiel with his message? Ezek. 2:3.

6. What was to be his message and what were the people to know? Ezek. 2:4, 5.

7. What characteristic of the Jews was dwelt upon? Ezek. 2:3-7.

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. What was the prophet told to eat and what did it symbolize? Ezek. 2:8, 3:1.
2. What was the prophet's commission thereafter? 3:4.
3. To whom was he not sent, as specified; unto whom, if sent, his words would have been received? Ezek. 3:5, 6.
4. What reason did the Lord give why Israel would not hearken? Ezek. 3:7.
5. How had the Lord prepared Ezekiel for his service? Ezek. 3:8.
6. To what was the prophet's forehead compared and what was he told not to fear? Ezek. 3:9.
7. How was the prophet commanded to receive and hear the word? Ezek. 3:10.
8. To which particular group of Jews was Ezekiel sent? Ezek. 3:11.
9. What lifted him up and what did he hear behind him? Ezek. 3:12.
10. What more did the prophet say he heard at this time? Ezek. 3:13.
11. What does the prophet say of the Spirit and hand of the Lord and of his own spirit? Ezek. 3:14.
12. Where did the prophet then go and where dwell? Ezek. 3:15.
13. How long did he remain overwhelmed and what then came to him? Ezek. 3:16.
14. What had the Lord made the prophet unto the house of Israel? Ezek. 3:17.
15. What importance did the Lord place upon warning the people? Ezek. 3:18.
16. What promise was made to Ezekiel in case he should faithfully warn the wicked people? Ezek. 3:19.
17. In case a man should turn from righteousness to iniquity, what should occur? Ezek. 3:20.
18. On what ground did the Lord say the prophet should be guilty and on what should he deliver his soul? Ezek. 3:20, 21.
19. Where, as the next place, did the Lord direct Ezekiel to go? Ezek. 3:22.
20. What occurred after the obedience of Ezekiel to the command? Ezek. 3:23.
21. What next was he told to do and what was foretold? Ezek. 3:24-26.
22. What was promised to take place after the prophet's dumbness? Ezek. 3:27.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. There is a striking similarity between the vision of Ezekiel as recorded in the first chapter of his prophecy, and the vision of John, as described in the first chapter of Revelation. There is the fire, the glow, the brightness, and there is also the falling down and the lifting up. The fire represents the intense and holy love of God, most probably. "Our God is a consuming fire." Who can stand in his holy place? Even angels fall down upon their faces to worship him. As the fire consumes the stubble, so the Lord will consume wickedness. More and more is he kindling the fire in the hearts of his people. He will sit as a refiner of silver. He will baptize with fire.

2. The expression "Son of man" is frequent in Ezekiel. It was chosen by our Lord as applicable to himself. He was both the Son of God—the only begotten—and also the Son of man. It was prophesied that the seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head. How highly was our nature honored in the condescension of the Lord to take it upon himself, to suffer humiliation and the deepest affliction in order to glorify it and exalt it to the throne! As the Son of man he hath power on earth to forgive sins. As the Son of man he knows, from the sorest experience, how to sympathize with us in all our infirmities. Heb. 4:15.

THE LIFE-GIVING STREAM.

Ezek. 47:1-12.

GOLDEN TEXT—He that will, let him take the water of life freely. Rev. 22:17.

Memory Verse—9. Suggested Reading—Rev. 22:1-5. Time—Probably about 570 B. C. Places—The Arabah, Engedi and Eneglaim. Persons—Ezekiel and a Man. (Ezek, 40:3.)

DAILY READINGS.

- Oct. 2..... M—Ezek. 47:1-12—The Life-Giving Stream.
 Oct. 3..... T—Joel 3:14-21—A Fountain Shall Come from the Lord's House.
 Oct. 4..... W—Zech. 13:1-6—A Fountain Opened for Sin and Uncleanliness.
 Oct. 5..... T—Jer. 2:14-19—Forsaking the Fountain of Living Waters.
 Oct. 6..... F—John 4:1-26—The Well of Living Water.
 Oct. 7..... S—Psa. 46:1-11—A River Making Glad the City of God.
 Oct. 8..... S—Rev. 22:1-5—The River of the Water of Life.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

The Arabah is the name at the present time applied to the valley extending from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Akabah, though in the Bible it refers to the entire depression which extends southward from the sea of Galilee. In this lesson the reference is to that part which lies immediately north of the Dead Sea.

Engedi is a spring which breaks out from

the hill on the western side of the Dead Sea. It once had a cultivated oasis about it, but now it is surrounded by a tangle of semi-tropical vegetation.

Eneglaim was farther north, near the mouth of the Jordan. Robinson thinks it is identical with a spring, the waters of which issue into the sea. The region is now and was then sterile and the waters of the Dead Sea afforded no fish.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

Ezekiel's "ministry began with a vision of God; it culminates in a vision of the people of God; or, rather, of God in the midst of his people, reconciled to them, ruling over them, and imparting the blessings and glories of the final dispensation." Twenty years pass by after his initial vision, and in the twenty-fifth year of the captivity, fourteen years after the fall of Jerusalem, the prophet delivers his longest and his most important message. It occupies the last nine chapters of his book. On the anniversary day of Jerusalem's fall he was taken by the Spirit of God to the ruins of the city and a man "whose

appearance was like the appearance of brass" became his guide and he was permitted to see the land and the city renewed and made fit for the habitation of God's people. It was a vision of ideal conditions. No portion of earth ever has been or ever can be laid out, peopled and cultivated in just the way in which Ezekiel saw this land, but it was a prophecy of the fact that a people who serve God in righteousness may find the earth generous and the cruelties of nature transformed by the hand of a loving and gracious God. It was Ezekiel's appeal to the captive

Israelites to turn to God and to serve him in righteousness. Ezekiel devotes four chapters (40-43) to a description of the temple under these new and ideal conditions. The actual temple was in ruins, but in his vision he sees it restored in surpassing magnificence. One chapter (44) is devoted to the priests, their

dwelling places and the purity of their lives. Three chapters (44-46) describe the lives of the people, the prince who reigns over them and his relation to his subjects and the ritual by which the worship in the temple is conducted. The next topic is the regeneration of the land and its allotment among the tribes.

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

"The temple stream to which Ezekiel's attention is now for the first time directed, is a symbol of the miraculous transformation which the land of Canaan is to undergo in order to fit it for the habitation of Jehovah's ransomed people. Anticipations of a renewal of the face of nature are a common feature of Messianic prophecy. . . . In the vicissitudes of agricultural or pastoral life the Israelite read the reflection of Jehovah's attitude toward himself and his people; fertile seasons and luxuriant harvest were the sign of his favor; drought and famine were the proof that he was offended. Even at the best of times, however, the condition of Palestine left much to be desired from the husbandman's point of view, especially in the kingdom of Judah. Nature was often stern and unpropitious, the cultivation of the soil was always attended with hardship and uncertainty, large tracts of country were given over to irreclaimable barrenness. There was always a vision of better things possible, and in the last days the prophet cherished the expectation that that vision would be realized. When all causes of offense are removed from Israel and Jehovah smiles on his people, the land will bloom into supernatural fertility, the ploughman overtaking the reaper, and the treader of grapes him that soweth seed, the mountains dropping new wine and the hills melting.

"To the southeast of Jerusalem, between it and the Dead Sea, stretched the great wilderness of Judah, the most desolate

and inhospitable tract in the whole country. There the steep declivity of the limestone range refuses to retain sufficient moisture to nourish the most meager vegetation, although the few spots where wells are found, as at Engedi, are clothed with almost tropical luxuriance. To reclaim these barren slopes and render them fit for human industry, the Temple waters are sent eastward, making the desert to blossom as the rose. Lastly, there was the Dead Sea itself, in whose bitter water no living thing can exist, the natural emblem of resistance to the purpose of him who is the God of life. These different elements of the physical reality were familiar to Ezekiel, and come back to mind as he follows the course of the new Temple river, and observes the wonderful transformation which it is destined to effect. He first sees it breaking forth from the wall of the Temple at the right-hand side of the entrance, and flowing eastward through the courts by the south side of the altar. Then at the outer wall he meets it rushing from the south side of the western gate, and still pursuing its easterly course. At a thousand cubits from the sanctuary it is only ankle-deep, but at successive distances of a thousand cubits it reaches to the knees, to the loins, and becomes finally an impassable river. The stream is, of course, miraculous from source to mouth. Earthly rivers do not thus broaden and deepen as they flow, except by the accession of tributaries, and tributaries are out of the question here. Thus it flows

1 And he brought me back unto the door of the house; and, behold, waters issued out from under the threshold of the house eastward (for the forefront of the house was toward the east); and the waters came down from under, from the right side of the house, on the south of the altar. 2 Then he brought me out by the way of the gate northward, and led

me round by the way without unto the outer gate, by the way of *the gate* that looketh toward the east; and, behold there ran out waters on the right side.

3 When the man went forth eastward with the line in his hand, he measured a thousand cubits, and he caused me to pass through the waters, waters that were to the ankles. 4 Again he measured

on, with its swelling volume of water, through 'the eastern circuit' 'down to the Arabah,' and reaching the sea it sweetens its waters so that they teem with fishes of all kinds like those of the Mediterranean. Its uninviting shores

become the scene of a busy and thriving industry; fishermen ply their crafts from Engedi to Eneglaim, and the food supply of the country is materially increased." (Skinner.)

EXPLANATORY.

1. **And he:** His angel guide. He is introduced and described in chapter 40: 3, 4. **He brought me back:** In the previous chapter he has described a trip under the direction of the angel guide through the courts of the temple. He is now brought back to the door at the east end of the temple. **The house:** The temple. **Waters issued from under the threshold:** The waters issued from beneath the threshold and flowed eastward. They passed on the south side of the altar of burnt offering. The stream ran out of the court of the temple on the right, that is, the south side of the eastern gate. Within the vicinity of the temple it was only a rill. It did not begin to increase greatly till it had passed outside of the court.

2. **By the way of the gate northward:** The eastern gate of the outer court was not for the use of ordinary men. The prince only could enter and pass out by it (Ez. 44:1-3). The eastern gate of the inner court was shut on the six working days, but opened on the Sabbath (46:1). This is

the reason why Ezekiel is conducted out of the court by the northern gate. **Led me round by the way:** After going out at the northern gate he and his angel guide went eastward to the angle and turned south to the point where the waters of the stream issued from the court. **There ran out waters:** The margin has, *trickled forth*. This shows that the stream at this point was very small.

3. **With the line in his hand:** When Ezekiel first sees his angel guide he has a reed and a line of flax, both for measuring purposes. In measuring long distances, as in this case, he uses the line. **A thousand cubits:** There were three cubits in use among the Jews, the long, the short and the medium length. The last was the one used by Ezekiel's guide. It was the shorter cubit plus a hand-breadth; that is, about eighteen inches (40:5). The distance measured was a little less than three furlongs. **Waters that were to the ankles:** The stream has increased in volume.

a thousand, and caused me to pass through the waters, waters that were to the knees. Again he measured a thousand, and caused me to pass through *the waters*, waters that were to the loins. 5. Afterward he measured a thousand; and it was a river that I could not pass through; for the waters were risen, waters to swim in, a river that could not be passed through.

6 And he said unto me, Son of man, hast thou seen *this*? Then he brought me, and caused me to return to the bank of the river. 7 Now when I had returned, behold, upon the bank of the river were

very many trees on the one side and on the other. 8 Then said he unto me, These waters issue forth toward the eastern region, and shall go down into the Arabah; and they shall go toward the sea; into the sea *shall the waters go* which were made to issue forth; and the waters shall be healed. 9 And it shall come to pass, that every living creature which swarmeth, in every place whither the rivers come, shall live; and and there shall be a very great multitude of fish; for these waters are come thither, and the *waters of the sea* shall be healed, and everything shall live whithersoever the river cometh. 10 And

4. Successive measurements show a stream with waters to the knees and then to the loins.

5. *The waters were risen, etc.*: The prophet multiplies figures of speech to denote the surprising increase in the size of the stream. It had risen, was a stream to swim in, was no longer fordable.

6. *Hast thou seen?* This question was asked to impress upon the prophet the fact and the significance of this remarkable increase in the volume of the stream. *To the bank of the river*: Probably along the bank. At any rate the attention of the prophet is now to be directed not to the waters of the stream, but to their effect as seen in the vegetation on the bank.

7. *Very many trees, etc.*: These growing on both banks of the stream show that the river was life-giving. Trees were the natural result of abundance of water, as is actually shown by the rank growth at Engedi.

8. *These waters, etc.*: This verse states three facts about the waters of the stream: (1) The direction in which they flow; this is eastward toward the sea. (2) The goal at which they arrive, the Arabah and finally the sea. (3) Their

effect—they heal the waters. The water of the Dead Sea is exceedingly salty. It is rendered pure and wholesome by the water of this stream.

9. *It shall come to pass, etc.*: This verse amplifies the last clause of v. 8, and states the effect of the waters of the Dead Sea being healed. Life shall be given to all manner of living creatures, and there shall be a great multitude of fishes. No living thing can now exist in the waters of the Dead Sea. Fishes that are carried down by the Jordan river perish within a few minutes after reaching the sea. A test has been made of putting sea fishes into the water of the Dead Sea, but they die in two or three minutes. *The rivers come*: The Hebrew has the dual, and means two rivers. Most probably the reference is to this river and the Jordan.

10. *Fishers shall stand by it, etc.*: This verse affirms three effects upon the Dead Sea produced by this purification of its waters: (1) Fishers shall ply their trade along its banks and on its surface. No fisherman has ever cast a net into its salty water. (2) The entire western shore, from a spring near the northern to another near the southern end, shall be

it shall come to pass, that fishers shall stand by it: from Engedi even unto Eneglaim shall be a place for the spreading of nets; their fish shall be after their kinds, as the fish of the great sea, exceeding many. 11 But the miry places thereof, and the marshes thereof, shall not be healed; they shall be given up to

salt. 12 And by the river upon the bank thereof, on this side and on that side, shall grow every tree for food, whose leaf shall not wither, neither shall the fruit thereof fail: it shall bring forth new fruit every month, because the waters thereof issue out of the sanctuary; and the fruit thereof shall be for food, and the leaf thereof for healing.

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used as a place to spread nets. This is to show the prolificness of its waters. (3) There shall be many varieties of fish in its waters. **The great sea:** The Mediterranean.

11. **They shall be given up to salt:** "It is from the Dead Sea that Jerusalem has always obtained its supply of salt. The purification of this lake might have its drawbacks if the production of this indispensable commodity should be interfered with. Salt, besides its culinary uses, played an important part in the temple ritual, and Ezekiel was not likely to forget it. Hence the strange but em-

inently practical provision that the shallows and marshes at the south end of the lake shall be exempted from the influences of the healing waters."

12. **Shall grow every tree for food:** This verse turns our attention from the waters of the sea back to the banks again. They are lined with fruit trees, which yield a continual succession of fruit monthly and have leaves with medicinal qualities. One naturally compares the tree of life which John saw growing beside the River of Life. It bears "twelve manner of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." Rev. 22:2.

COMMENTS.

The Source of the Stream. (v. 1.) The temple which crowned the summit of the sacred mount, to Ezekiel more than to almost any other prophet, symbolized the presence of Jehovah. When he tells us that he saw the stream issue from beneath the temple he indicates by this that the stream of life has its origin from God himself. It represents the blessings which proceed from God to animate and refresh mankind. John saw the river of life proceeding out of the throne of God and the Lamb (Rev. 22:1).

The Actual and the Ideal. While Ezekiel's stream is an ideal one, there was the actual there which suggested it. There

was flowing out from the temple mount a small stream whose *softly flowing* waters Isaiah had used as "a symbol of the silent and unobtrusive influence of the divine presence in Israel" (8:6). It is characteristic of Ezekiel to start with the real and idealize it as he does in this case. The actual stream was too tiny to contribute to the fertility of the land, but Ezekiel's ideal stream waters and enriches the most desolate region of all the land.

The Increasing Stream. (vs. 4, 5.) The remarkable increase in the volume of the stream which the prophet notes is characteristic of God's blessings. His

guide pauses to impress this upon the prophet. The student of the New Testament will compare the parable of the Mustard Seed and of the Leaven. The history of the Christian church shows just such an increase. Starting from Pentecost, the church's sphere of influence spread gradually until it coincided with the Roman Empire and the known world. It is true likewise of the individual. Jesus used this same figure of a stream to represent the truth that a believer does not contain all of God's blessings, but becomes himself a source of help to others. Cf. John 7:38.

"The Waters Issue Out of the Sanctuary." This statement gives the prophet's reason for the growth which lines the river's banks. It is his reason also for the fruitfulness of the waters of the sea. That which God gives is intended to bless men, and everything which comes from him is for man's welfare. This was the great truth about God which Jesus impressed upon his generation. "Your heavenly Father knoweth that you have need of all these things." If he knows that we need, it is his pleasure to satisfy these needs. "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." He "gives good gifts to those who ask him."

A New Earth. "Another current idea was that in the regeneration of men, when the tabernacle of God was with them, external nature would also be transfigured. Then every good would be enjoyed and there would be no more evil nor curse. The desert would blossom like the rose, and the field that aforesaid was thought fruitful should be accounted no better than a bush. The barren land toward the east and the bitter waters of the sea were a contradiction to the ideal of an external nature subservient in all her parts to man in the fellowship of God. Therefore the desert shall be fertilized and the waters of the sea healed, and all things minister to man's good. But 'good' to the Israelite was not exclusively spirit-

ual, it was also material. It would be an error to regard this fertilizing, healing stream in the light of a mere symbol for blessings which we call 'spiritual.' It is well fitted in other connections to be such a symbol; but to take it so here would be to overstep the limits of the Old Testament and anticipate a later revelation. As yet the Israelite had no conception of a transcendent sphere of existence for men in the fellowship of God, such as we name heaven. Man's final abode, even in his perfect state, was considered to be still on earth. God came down and dwelt with men; men were not translated to abide with God." (Davidson.)

The Waters Shall Be Healed. "The main stream of fertility is expended in the apparently hopeless task of reclaiming the Judean desert and purifying the Dead Sea. It is an emblem of the earthly ministry of Him who made himself the friend of publicans and sinners, and lavished the resources of his grace and the wealth of his affection on those who were deemed beyond ordinary possibility of salvation. It is to be feared, however, that the practice of most churches has been too much the reverse of this. They have been tempted to confine the water of life within fairly respectable channels, amongst the prosperous and contented, the occupants of happy homes, where the advantages of religion are most likely to be appreciated. . . . But the true spirit of Christianity can neither be confined to the watercourses of religious habit, nor wait for the schemes of the social reformer. Nor will it display its power of social salvation until it carries the energies of the church into the lowest haunts of vice and misery with an earnest desire to seek and save that which is lost. Ezekiel had his vision, and he believed in it. He believed in the reality of God's presence in the sanctuary and in the stream of blessings that flowed from his throne, and he believed in the possibility

of reclaiming the waste places of his country for the kingdom of God. When Christians are united in like faith in the power of Christ and the abiding presence of his Spirit, we may expect to see times

of refreshing from the presence of God, and the whole earth filled with the knowledge of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (Skinner.)

THE LESSON STORY.

Under striking parables and figures, God's prophets sought to present the necessary lessons of salvation. Ezekiel, particularly, was a vivid painter of instructive pictures. The river arose out from beneath the threshold of the temple. How blessed is a fountain that satisfies thirst, cleanses, quickens, fructifies and turns desolation into delight! The Pharpar and Abanah of Damascus may be famous streams and most beautiful, as Naaman thought. But God's chosen Jordan alone can change the leper's skin to the pure, soft skin of a little child. The world has its great rivers for commerce, for beauty and historic interest, but God's river only can make the soul of man like a fertile garden of the Lord. The river which Ezekiel saw in his prophetic vision issued from the far away temple at Jerusalem. Ours issues from the heart of Jesus, our all-sufficient Lord. The old temple on the hill in Jerusalem was a type of him who said: "Destroy this temple and in three days I will build it again." Christ was the true and perfect temple. No wonder the veil was rent when he was crucified. No wonder that the old dispensation, and the very prophecy for which the old temple stood, found perfect fulfillment in the Lord of the temple.

The river issuing from the temple was going out to carry life and beauty to the barrenness of earth. He that knoweth Christ shall not be barren nor unfruitful in his service, nor shall he fail in his joy. He maketh the wilderness glad and the solitary place a delightful trysting place, and the wilderness shall bloom and blossom as the rose. Any one delighting

in the Lord "shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water. He shall bring forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither, and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper." The river grows deeper and deeper. A little child may wade in its shallows. A child may understand some of its pleasures. Youths may walk with joy and hope into its waves and it will not overflow them. They, however, can not sound its depths. The men and women of great spiritual experience can appreciate and enjoy its mighty volume as it sweeps on irresistibly to the sea.

Those poor captives that sat down by the river and hung their harps on the willows, refusing to sing a song of Zion in a strange land and far away from the site of their temple, were told of a river issuing from that memorable temple. That is the ideal stream that makes glad the whole city of God. That was the crystal river which John beheld after all storms of sin were past, all evil was cast out, and on the banks of which grow the fruits of the tree of life whose very leaves are for the healing of the nations.

If we literalize we kill the story. It was not a literal river. The New Jerusalem, prepared as a bride for her bridegroom, is not a literal, material city. Heaven itself is not described in literal language. "Eye hath not seen nor ear heard, neither hath entered into the heart of man the things that God hath prepared for them that love him." Draw your pictures, Isaiah, Daniel and Ezekiel, and under the divine afflatus make them more beautiful than human fancy has ever painted, and then know that a thou-

sand fold more beautiful will be the river and the paradise of God.

It is not for "fish" nor for fishing that God cares in the picture of the river which Ezekiel saw in the vision, but for men who shall live and flourish in the waters of the stream of God from his

temple and his throne. It is not for the literal trees upon the river's banks that God is concerned; it is for men. The effect of the Word of God, of the gospel from the heart of Christ, will bring spiritual and eternal results as marvelous and joy-giving as can be represented by fish and trees and far-reaching fertility.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What great fact was symbolized by the eating of the roll?
2. Tell what Ezekiel beheld in his vision—the chief object?
3. What was the substance of the message entrusted to the prophet?
4. To whom and under what circumstances was the message to be delivered?
5. What was the special point of significance in the term "watchman"?
6. What impressive lesson of responsibility is taught concerning both the watchman who warns, or fails to warn, and the person warned?
7. In what respect is the church appointed or called to act as a watchman?

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. What person was this leading the prophet? See Ezekiel 40:3, 4.
2. To what particular place was Ezekiel brought as named in Ezek 47:1?
3. What did he there and then behold? Ezek 47:1.
4. From where did the stream arise and whence did it flow? Ezek 47:1.
5. On which side of the eastern gate—north or south—did it flow? Ezek. 47:2.
6. What did the guide hold in his hand and what was its use? Ezek 47:3.
7. After the first measurement how deep were the waters? Ezek. 47:3.
8. How deep was the stream at the second and third measurements? Ezek. 47:4.
9. How deep was the stream at the fourth measurement? Ezek 47:5.
10. What question did he ask of the prophet and why did he ask it? Ezek. 47:6.
11. After viewing the stream itself, to what did the guide ask the prophet's attention? Ezek. 47:7.
12. What did the guide say should be the destination of the waters? Ezek 47:8.
13. What effect would the stream have upon the waters into which they should flow? Ezek. 47:8.
14. What effect would they have upon the fish in the seas? Ezek 47:9.
15. What is said concerning the fishermen and their nets? Ezek. 47:10.
16. Should all the miry places and marshes be healed? Ezek. 47:11.
17. What was declared with reference to the banks of the river? Ezek 47:12.
18. What was said of the leaf, the fruit and its frequency? Ezek. 47:12.
19. The promise was made because the stream issued from where? Ezek. 47:12.
20. What are we to think as to that symbolized by the stream?

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. A stream is a favorite symbol in the New Testament, as also in the Old. Joel tells of the fountain that should come forth from the house of Jehovah and water the flowers of the valley. Zechariah foretells the fountain opened in the house of David for sin and uncleanness. What fountain but Jesus could be signified? Jeremiah speaks of forsaking the fountain of living waters, which fountain represented the Lord himself. Instead of drinking of his word and life they had hewed out for themselves cisterns that held no water. The Lord Jesus told the Samaritan woman that if she would ask of him he would give her a well, or fountain, of living water, springing up within her soul unto eternal life. The Psalmist speaks of the river that makes glad the city of God. John describes the pure river of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God. Jesus prophesied that out of the inner life of the believer in him should flow rivers of living water (Jno. 7:37-29).

2. This water may stand for God, his Spirit, Word, Life, so frequently granted

to slake the thirst and to heal the sins of men—as Naaman was healed of his leprosy in the Jordan—to refresh and prosper all who will seek its life and power, and to make glad the great city of our God. Life, healing, prosperity, and happiness come from the river which Ezekiel saw and which continued in the days of Jesus' ministry among men. After all the sad battles are over and all the hopelessly wicked are cast out the blessed stream shall flow on, as John has described in the opening verses of the last chapter of Revelation.

3. "I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of life freely." This was a precious promise made by our Lord to the thirsty. Blessed indeed are they that hunger and thirst after righteousness, for they shall be satisfied. God may withhold earthly pleasures or treasures from men for their good, but he will not withhold the water of life from them who thirst. It is said, also, in Revelation that the Lamb in the midst of the throne shall be the Shepherd of the redeemed and shall lead them unto fountains of waters of life.

Lesson III.

October 15.

THE RETURN FROM THE CAPTIVITY

Ezra 1:1-11, 2:64-70. (Print 1:1-11.)

GOLDEN TEXT—He retaineth not his anger for ever, because he delighteth in loving-kindness. Micah 7:18.

Memory Verses—1:3-4. **Suggested Reading**—Ezra 1 and 2. **Time**—538 B. C. **Places**—Babylon and Jerusalem. **Persons**—Cyrus, Mithredath, Sheshbazzar, and the captive Jews.

DAILY READINGS.

Oct. 9.....M—Ezra 1:1-11; 2:64-70—The Return from the Captivity.

Oct. 10.....T—Isa. 45:1-13—The Lord's Word to Cyrus.

Oct. 11.....W—Isa. 44:21-28—Cyrus as the Lord's Shepherd.

Oct. 12.....T—2 Chron. 36:22, 23—The Word of the Lord by Cyrus.

Oct. 13.....F—Jer. 25:1-14—The Word of the Lord by Jeremiah.

Oct. 14.....S—Jer. 29:1-14—The Word of the Lord Again by Jeremiah.

Oct. 15.....S—Ezek. 37:1-28—Ezekiel's Prophecy of the Resurrection of Israel.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

For more than half a century Jerusalem has lain in ruins. Her conqueror "brake down the walls of Jerusalem round about" and it had remained in desolation till the time of our lesson. A few of the baser people may have sought shelter

in her ruins, but for the most part she was left alone while the noblest of the nation's spirits poured out lamentations over her fall. This was her condition when Sheshbazzar and his party returned to rebuild it.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

For many years the Babylonian captivity was impending. For more than a century before it came its shadow lay across the national life of Judah and Jerusalem and the prophets freely predicted its coming. A number of the lessons studied have contained warnings of its approach. Two of the prophets from whose books some of our lessons have been selected were active during the period of the captivity. Daniel in Babylon and Ezekiel among the captives on the river Chebar have each contributed his part to the establishment of the truer faith in the hearts of their countrymen. Our present lesson tells of the end of this night of sorrow and of the dawning of a new day for the chosen people. The captivity

has wrought its work in their lives. They went out with idolatry in their hearts and a tardy recognition of Jehovah as the only true God; on the eve of their return they are thorough monotheists willing to sacrifice property and life itself in the defense of their faith. The year 538 B. C. was the closing year of the captivity. In that year Cyrus pushed his conquests into the rich, broad valley of the Euphrates and Tigris and the great city of Babylon fell before his victorious arms. Religious and political reasons conspired together to influence him in deciding to permit the captive Jews to return to their native land. The decree to this effect was issued in the first year of his Babylonian reign and the return was not later than the following year.

THE BOOK OF EZRA.

The book of Ezra is a continuation of the history as related in the second book of Chronicles. In fact the very words which close 2 Chronicles are repeated as the opening of the book of Ezra. Many scholars have believed one and the same man was the compiler of both books. The latter book is, to a large extent, made

up of the primitive records which are copied without change. Much of our present lesson is made up of the edict issued by Cyrus, and the second chapter contains little else than the list of names of those who returned from the captivity, a list which, as the circumstances show, was copied from some public records.

CYRUS KING OF PERSIA.

"Cyrus, as it now appears, was originally king of Elam, the modern Khuzistan, not of Persia, although the royal family from which he sprang was of Persian extraction. After making himself master of Persia and building up an empire in Asia Minor and the north, he swept down on to the plains of Chaldea and captured Babylon in the year B. C. 538. To the Jews this would be the first year of his reign, because it was the first year of his rule over them, just as the year A. D. 1603 is reckoned by Englishmen as the first year of James I, because the king of Scotland then inherited the English throne. In this year the new sovereign, of his own initiative, released the Hebrew exiles; and even assisted them to return to Jerusalem and rebuild their ruined temple. Such an astonishing act of generosity was contrary to the precedent of other conquerors, who accepted, as a matter of course, the arrangement of subject races left by their predecessors; and we

are naturally curious to discover the motives that prompted it.

"Like our mythical King Arthur, the Cyrus of legend is credited with a singularly attractive disposition. Herodotus says the Persians regarded him as their 'father' and their 'shepherd.' In Xenophon's romance he appears as a very kindly character. Cicero calls him the most just, wise, and amiable of rulers. Although it can not be dignified with the name of history, this universally accepted tradition seems to point to some foundation in fact. It is entirely in accord with the Jewish picture of the Great King. There is some reason for believing that the privilege Cyrus offered to the Jews was one in which other nations shared. On a small, broken clay cylinder, some four inches in diameter, discovered quite recently and now deposited in the British Museum, Cyrus is represented as saying, "I assembled all those nations, and I caused them to go back to their countries." (Adeney.)

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

There were three companies of pilgrims whose return from the Jewish captivity in Babylon to Jerusalem is described in the two books of Ezra and Nehemiah. The first was led by Zerubbabel and Jeshua in the year 537 B. C. The second was conducted by Ezra himself (see lesson for

November 19), and its return was eighty years after the former. The third was but little later than the second and was under the leadership of Nehemiah. Our present lesson tells of the return of the first of those three. It was by far the most numerous of the returning parties.

1 Now in the first year of Cyrus, king of Persia, that the word of Jehovah by the mouth of Jeremiah might be accomplished, Jehovah stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his king-

dom, and *put it* also in writing, saying, 2 Thus saith Cyrus king of Persia, All the kingdoms of the earth hath Jehovah, the God of heaven, given me; and he hath charged me to build him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 3 Who-

EXPLANATORY.

1. **Now:** This is the translation of the Hebrew word for *and*. It shows that this is a continuation of the history given in 2 Chronicles. Verses 1-3 are almost word for word the same as the closing verses of that book. **In the first year of Cyrus:** Cyrus became king of Elam in 558 B. C. and of Persia in 548. The first year referred to in Ezra is considered to be the first year of his rule in Babylon, which was twenty years after he became king in Elam and ten years after he became king of Persia. It was the first year that he came in contact with the Jews. **That the word of Jehovah:** The divine purpose which was to restore the people to their land. **By the mouth of Jeremiah:** This refers to Jeremiah's prophecy that the captivity should last seventy years. It began in the fourth year of Jehoiakim (Jer. 25:1-12), which was in 606 B. C. If this was in 538 B. C., and their return was the year following, the period was actually about sixty-nine years only. **Might be accomplished:** Jehovah is thought of, as is always the case in the Scripture, as the sovereign and ruler of history. He stirred up Jeremiah to make the prophecy, and now at the proper time he fulfills it. **Stirred up the spirit of Cyrus:** Cyrus is left to act of his own volition, but the author thinks that the prime mover in this is Jehovah. He acts upon the purpose and will of men in various ways. **And put it also in writing:** This is added to show that the decree was not a Jewish invention, but

was accessible among the official documents.

2. **Thus saith Cyrus, etc.:** The proclamation was originally written in Persian or Aramaic. The substance of it is given in vs. 2-4, as it was translated into Hebrew and adapted to Jewish readers. "It is a popular reproduction rather than a literal translation." (Ryle.) **Jehovah, the God of heaven:** Attractive as such a view is, this language does not warrant us in believing that Cyrus worshiped Jehovah. Since there was a lofty monotheistic religion among the Persians, the commentators used to assume that Cyrus was a monotheist, and so it was explained that he would be attracted to the religion of the Jews. Unfortunately, we now know this not to be true. Cylinders have been discovered in which he gives praise to the Babylonian gods and claims their support for him. He was a polytheist and remained so to the last. He would have means of learning the Jewish belief about Jehovah. Josephus even says that he read the book of Isaiah and saw the latter's prophecy concerning himself. This is probably no more than a guess on the part of Josephus. Cyrus was accustomed to use ascriptions of praise to the gods of other lands, and so he gives the credit for this purpose of his to Jehovah, whom he describes in true Persian style as the God of heaven. This is a title for God which has not been used before, but becomes common during this period. Cf. Ezra 6:9, 10; 7:12, 21,

soever there is among you of all his people, his God be with him, and let him go up to Jerusalem, which is in Judah, and build the house of Jehovah, the God of Israel (he is God), which is in Jerusalem. 4 And whosoever is left, in any place where he sojourneth, let the men of his place help him with silver, and with gold, and with goods, and with beasts, besides the freewill-offering for

the house of God which is in Jerusalem.

5 Then rose up the heads of fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin, and the priests, and the Levites, even all whose spirit God had stirred to go up to build the house of Jehovah which is in Jerusalem. 6 And all they that were round about them strengthened their hands with vessels of silver, with gold, with goods, and with beasts, and with precious things, besides all that was willingly offered. 7

23; Neh. 1:4, 5; 2:4, 20; Dan. 2:18. **Given me:** A pious way of stating the fact that he had conquered his territory and had not inherited it. **He both charged, etc.:** We are left in ignorance as to how Jehovah communicated this charge to Cyrus. Josephus, as stated above, says that he read the prophecy of Isaiah. Probably Josephus had no more information on this point than we possess. Daniel was in Babylon at that time, and it is not unreasonable to suppose that he may have interceded with Cyrus in behalf of his people. In whatever way he received this command from Jehovah, he fulfilled Isa. 44:24-28. **A house:** A temple.

Jews, and this statement gives them information who Jehovah is. It agrees better with the polytheistic belief of Cyrus. It is the reading of the margin. Cf. end of v. 4.

4. **Whosoever is left, etc.:** The thought is that assistance is to be given by his neighbors to any Jew who availed himself of the king's decree permitting him to return. **With silver and, etc.:** The assistance was to be in such things as would be useful in building the house, defraying the expenses of the journey, and in providing means of transportation.

5. **Heads of fathers' houses:** The subdivisions of the people were (1) tribes, (2) families, and (3) households. These were the heads of families. **Of Judah and Benjamin, etc.:** It is not to be understood that all of the heads of families of the three tribes mentioned returned. Many remained behind. Those that went are the ones whose spirit God had stirred. They, as well as Cyrus, received the divine impulse.

6. **Strengthened their hands:** The command of Cyrus (v. 4) was obeyed. It is not clear whether the command of Cyrus was voluntary or compulsory. The exhortations of kings are apt to be little short of commands. The precept and the example of the king both had weight.

7. **The vessels of the house of Jeho-**

3. **Among you of all his people:** The form of the sentence shows that the decree is addressed generally to all the inhabitants of the Persian empire, but especially to the Jews that dwelt among them. **His God be with him:** A prayer for the welfare of the one about to return. **Let him go up, etc.:** This was the primary purpose of the proclamation. **(He is God) which is in Jerusalem:** The original text had no punctuation. The brackets were inserted by the translators, which makes the clause, "which is in Jerusalem," refer to the house of Jehovah. But it did not then exist. By removing the brackets as superfluous, we read, "He is the God which is in Jerusalem." The edict was addressed to strangers to the

Also Cyrus the king brought forth the vessels of the house of Jehovah, which Nebuchadnezzar had brought forth out of Jerusalem, and had put in the house of his gods; 8 even those did Cyrus king of Persia bring forth by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and numbered them unto Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. 9 And this is the number of them: thirty platters of gold, a thousand platters of

silver, nine and twenty knives, 10 thirty bowls of gold, silver bowls of a second sort four hundred and ten, and other vessels a thousand. 11 All the vessels of gold and of silver were five thousand and four hundred. All these did Sheshbazzar bring up when they of the captivity were brought up from Babylon unto Jerusalem.

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vah: Other peoples would be permitted to take back their gods with them. The Jews had no idol, but they did regard with special respect these sacred vessels. They are permitted to take these back.

8. Sheshbazzar: He is here called prince of Judah. Later he is called the governor (5:14). He laid the foundation of the temple (5:16). Zerubbabel, too, is mentioned as governor (Haggai 2:2, 21). The same prophet exhorts Zerubbabel to build the temple (1:14). He was the leader along with Jeshua, the high priest (Ezra 3:3, 8; 4:3; 5:2) and was of the Davidic line. They are therefore probably identical. Zerubbabel was the son of Shealtiel, who was reckoned as a son of Jehoiachin (Matt. 1:2).

11. Six classes of vessels are mentioned and the total of all classes is 2,499. The text states that the total number was 5,400. Two solutions of the difficulty suggest themselves: (1) A large number of the unimportant vessels are omitted, but the last clause of v. 10, "Other vessels a thousand," seems in-

tended to cover the remainder. (2) An error has crept into the text. This not infrequently happened, especially in the case of numbers.

2:64. This verse gives the total of the returning pilgrims. The same total is given in Nehemiah (6:66), and the Apocryphal book 1 Esdras (54:1). The addition of the various classes mentioned by Ezra does not produce this total. Some have been omitted.

65. Singing men and singing women: These were a variety of servants.

66-67. The horses and mules would be ridden by the wealthier; the asses by the poorer persons. The camels were beasts of burden.

69. Darics: The daric was a Persian coin. Its value was almost the same as an English sovereign. The total sum mentioned here equals about \$300,000. **Pounds:** The Hebrew maneh, the fiftieth part of a talent.

70. Before they commenced to build they made their homes in their ancestral cities. The Nethinim were a servant class, probably descendants of the Gibeonites.

COMMENTS.

"Jehovah Stirred up the Spirit of Cyrus." The author commits himself firmly to the belief that the return was of the Lord. He reaches this conclusion

first of all because he believed that Jehovah is God of all the earth. As the universal sovereign he had control of the affairs of all nations, but in a very

special way ruled all things for the profit of his chosen people Israel. In accord with this providence over the nations he had caused his prophet to predict the return of his captive people. Their return, therefore, was the work of Jehovah. Our belief in the correctness of his conclusion will not be shaken by the knowledge that Cyrus had political motives of his own for his proclamation permitting the Jews to return. Furthermore the Jews were not the only captive people who were allowed to go back to their home. All of this shows that Cyrus had ordinary human motives for his actions. These two reasons, the divine and the human, are present in all historical events and are not contradictory. The policy of Nebuchadnezzar in moving people from their ancestral homes in the hope that they would thereby lose their patriotism and race feelings was not an unqualified success. Cyrus discovered that there were a number of bodies of foreigners among the population of Babylon that were restless and dissatisfied. This was a danger to the safety of the state, and by permitting them to return he would win their friendship and would plant on the distant borders of his empire a grateful and a loyal body of subjects. It was a wise act and does credit to Cyrus' statescraft, but the author of Ezra is no less correct when he tells us that it was of the Lord.

"Let Him Go Up." The decree of Cyrus is not a command, but a permission. The Jews were not expelled from Babylon. Those who desired to remain might do so in peace and enjoy the prosperity of Babylon. The restoration of the temple was purely voluntary. This would really give it greater vigor than if it were compulsory, and it conforms more to God's method of dealing with souls. Cyrus makes it evident that the sole purpose of the return was to build the temple. Nothing is said about rebuilding or fortifying Jerusalem. It was not a social,

nor a political, but a religious movement. It was the return of a religious body—a church, rather than a nation.

An Organized Company. (v. 5.) It should be noticed that the exiles are organized. They were not a mere crowd. The captivity had not broken up their national feeling. In truth it had intensified it. The returning exiles belonged to three tribes, Judah, Benjamin, and Levi. No representative from the ten tribes is mentioned. Next were the religious classes, the priests and Levites. The tribes had smaller organizations within them.

A Divine Work. "It was by no means the case that the whole of the exiles rose up in answer to the edict of Cyrus; only those leaders and only those people responded 'whose spirit God had stirred.' The privilege was offered to all the Jews, but it was not accepted by all. We can not but be impressed by the religious faith and the inspired insight of our historian in this matter. He saw that Cyrus issued his edict because the Lord had stirred up his spirit; now he attributes the prompting to make use of the proffered liberty to a similar divine influence. Thus the return was a movement of heaven-sent impulses throughout. Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones showed the deplorable condition of the northern kingdom in his day—stripped bare, shattered to fragments, scattered abroad. The condition of Judah was only second to this ghastly national ruin. But now to Judah there had come the breath of the Divine Spirit which Ezekiel saw promised for Israel, and a living army was rising up in new energy. Here we may discover the deeper, the more vital source of the return. Without this the edict of Cyrus would have perished as a dead letter. Even as it was, only those people who felt the breath of the Divine afflatus rose up for the arduous undertaking. So to-day there is no return to the heavenly Jerusalem and

no rebuilding the fallen temple of human nature except in the power of the Spirit of God. Regeneration always goes hand

in hand with redemption—the work of the Spirit with the work of the Christ.” (Adeney.)

THE LESSON STORY.

The fall of Jerusalem led to the exile of the Jews and the fall of Babylon resulted in their glad release. Cyrus, the Persian, on conquering Babylon gave freedom to the captives and encouraged them to return to their native land, and rebuild the temple. Fifty years of captivity had only served to intensify the nation's patriotism and its loyalty to Jehovah. As captives in Babylon they had looked back with homesick longing to the Holy City, now in ruins, and with true devotion to the temple, whose sacred service they had so often profaned. Through all the years of exile Judah had been cheered by prophecies of the return. Ezekiel, by words, symbols, parables and visions, had set forth the promise of this glad event, and Jeremiah and Isaiah, prophesying more explicitly, had given the very time of the return, and the actual name of the nation's great deliverer. Among the most striking of Ezekiel's prophecies is the one in which he compares Assyria to a mighty cedar of Lebanon, towering above all the trees of the forest. Yet he declares that it shall be cut down, like a cedar (Ezek. 31:3-11). The significance of this lies in the fact that when the cedar is cut down it never springs up again. “In contrast to the mighty cedar falling never to rise again, we see the lowly vine of Judah, from which, though now pruned down to the very roots, shall spring a vigorous branch.”

No event in the history of the Jews was of more far-reaching value than the exile. It served as a pruning of the nation that it might “bear more fruit.” It broke forever the power of idolatry, and taught the value of true religion. As Dr. MacLaren expresses it, colors burned in on china are permanent, and the furnace of

bondage had at least effected this, that it fixed monotheism forever in the inmost substance of the Jewish people. Moreover it led to renewed study of the sacred Scriptures. It also brought together the representatives of the divided kingdom, and made one nation when there had been two, “welding the twelve tribes together like iron in a furnace.” The discipline of the exile having accomplished its purpose, in due season Cyrus was sent for the deliverance of the captives. Under the edict of the great conqueror, the return was to be a volunteer movement. As Nebuchadnezzar had sifted the nation when he carried to Babylon the strongest and best among the people, so now there was to be a second sifting, for since the return was to be voluntary, none but the most religious and patriotic would choose to go. It has been calculated that the exiles who returned stood to those who remained in the proportion of one to six. Many of the Jews who had acquired wealth preferred staying in this foreign but not unfriendly land, to look after their property, and pursue the occupations in which they had been engaged.

Aside from this it was far easier to remain in Babylon, amid comfortable surroundings, than to undertake the hardships of the journey back to Palestine. There were deep rivers to be crossed, desert lands and rugged mountains to be traversed, savage tribes to be encountered, and the long journey was to end at last with the desolate city and the temple in ruins. We can not wonder that only those “whose spirit God had stirred up” were brave enough to face such dangers and endure such hardships. Prominent among the leaders of this, the first return, were Zerubbabel, of the royal line of

David, and Jeshua, the high priest, and the heads of the fathers' houses of Judah and Benjamin. The Jews who chose to stay in Babylon, and also "all that were about them," generously contributed to defray the expenses and to alleviate the hardships of those who returned. Beasts of burden were provided to convey the families and goods of the returning Jews; also generous gifts of silver and gold, for the rebuilding of the temple. Among their most precious treasures were the sacred vessels of the temple, those which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away, and which had figured in Belshazzar's feast. These, numbering in all five thousand and four hundred, had been restored to them by Cyrus.

According to the figures given in Ezra, about fifty thousand were in this company who set their faces Zionward. Forth

from the gates of Babylon they rode to the sound of joyous music, a band of horsemen, playing on flutes and tabrets, accompanied by their own two hundred minstrel slaves and one hundred and twenty-eight singers of the temple (Ezra 2:41, 65). In this joyous exodus the prophetic words of Isaiah were strikingly fulfilled: "Go ye forth from Babylon, flee ye from the Chaldeans; with a voice of singing declare ye, tell this, utter it even to the end of the earth: say ye, Jehovah hath redeemed his servant Jacob" (Isa. 48:20).

"The burst of joy was such as had no parallel in the sacred volume, for it was indeed the Revival, the Second Birth, the Second Exodus of the nation." (Stanley.)

The captivity of Zion, "so long in hostile lands," was forever broken, for "God himself" had loosed her "bands."

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. From whence did the stream issue which the prophet saw?
2. Whence did it flow and to what destination?
3. How many measurements were made and what the depth at each?
4. What was the effect of the stream upon animal and plant life?

5. What did the stream represent or symbolize?

6. What is the present great regenerative power in the world?

7. What should be our attitude toward the gospel and toward those who do not appreciate and enjoy its blessings?

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. What similarity do you notice between the last of 2 Chronicles and the first of Ezra? See Historical Connection—Book of Ezra.

2. What great king was instrumental in the return of the captives? Ezra 1:1.

3. The act of the king was in order to the fulfillment of whose prophecy? Ezra 1:1.

4. How did it come to pass that Cyrus was moved to make the proclamation? Ezra 1:1.

5. What did Cyrus say Jehovah had given him? Ezra 1:2.

6. What also did king Cyrus say God had charged him? Ezra 1:2.

7. What permission, therefore, did Cyrus grant and to whom? Ezra 1:3.

8. In case any should not be able to go for lack of means what were his neighbors to do for him? Ezra 1:4.

9. What in addition to this were the neighbors to bestow upon the returning captives who needed assistance? Ezra 1:4.

10. What three classes are mentioned as then rising up to go? Ezra 1:5.

11. What was the motive appealed to for the return? Ezra 1:5.

12. What kindness was shown to the returning captives? Ezra 1:6.

13. What act of Cyrus at that time was especially commendable? Ezra 1:7.

14. How many vessels of gold and silver were returned to Jerusalem? Ezra 1:11.

15. The whole assembly together was how large? Ezra 2:64.

16. How many men servants and maid servants were there? Ezra 2:65.

17. How many singing men and singing women were there? Ezra 2:65.

18. What animals, and how many, were included in the number taken to Jerusalem? Ezra 2:66.

19. According to what principle did some of the heads of the people give into the treasury? Ezra 2:69.

20. What is said as to their willingness in making their offerings for the house of God? Ezra 2:68.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. The Lord provides for his people. It is impossible for men to conceive the many ways in which God may fulfill his purposes. Cyrus became an instrument in his hands for the accomplishment of his purpose, just as did Pilate or as many other governors or kings have been used to further the Divine will. "All things work together for good to them that love God."

2. The people so long absent from and denied the privilege of the temple of God in Jerusalem now are longing for return to it, and to that end are willing to contribute and sacrifice. The temple seems to have been uppermost in their thoughts and ambitions. It must be rebuilt, but the enterprise will furnish a happy exercise both for their religion and their patriotism.

3. We are not dependent upon a temple, nor a place of worship, as were the Jews. They that worship God may worship him in any spot provided they worship in spirit and truth. They that worship truly must worship thus. But the temple may be a great advantage. Many devout souls had learned to worship and find the Lord even in Babylon, as Daniel and Ezekiel had found him there. Our Lord

told his disciples they might find their Father within their closets and he found the Father on the mountain, in the home or by the sea.

4. This lesson concerning Cyrus and his purpose ought to strengthen our faith. Jesus sought always to increase the faith of his disciples in God. God loves to show himself in power and mercy for his saints. He rejoiced at every exhibition of trust and of great confidence in God. In due season God opens up a way for the return of the exiled Jews from Chaldea. Here in Babylon were wonderful exhibitions of faith—examples among the brightest in history.

5. Men are prepared to make offerings to God for his temple and his worship. In the New Testament church members were taught to contribute cheerfully, according to their ability and with regularity. The world's wealth should be consecrated to God. Every dollar earned or possessed is a sacred thing. The silver all belongs to God; the gold is his also. The earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof. Let us learn the lesson of liberality for the sake of Christ and the Gospel, and also for our own sake.

THE FOUNDATION OF THE SECOND TEMPLE LAID.

Ezra 3:1—4:5. (Print 3:8—4:5.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise. Psa. 100:4.

Memory Verse—3:11. **Suggested Reading**—Ezra 4:24—6:22. **Time**—537 B. C. **Place**—The temple site. **Persons**—Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Priests, Levites, Jews and their adversaries.

DAILY READINGS.

- Oct. 16.....M—Ezra 3:1-13—The Laying of the Foundations.
- Oct. 17.....T—Ezra 4:1-24—The Work Stopped by Enemies.
- Oct. 18.....W—Hag. 1:1-15—Call of Haggai to Resume the Building.
- Oct. 19.....T—Hag. 2:1-23—The Latter Glory of this House to be Greater.
- Oct. 20.....F—Zech. 4:1-14—"Not by Might nor by Power, but by My Spirit."
- Oct. 21.....S—Ezra 5:1-17—The Building of the Temple Resumed.
- Oct. 22.....S—Ezra 6:1-22—The Temple Dedicated with Joy.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

On the summit of the eastern of the two hills on which Jerusalem now stands lay the site of the temple, in former times the threshing-floor of Araunah, where David had built an altar. Here the temple of Solomon had been built surrounded by an inner and an outer court. To give room for these Solomon had built

walls about the hill and had filled in the intervening spaces. The rock Es-sakhra, now under the Dome of the Rock, is still regarded as a holy site and is the location of either the altar of burnt offering or the holy of holies. On this same spot the second temple was built, as is described in our lesson.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

The previous lesson tells of the return from the captivity, while this lesson tells of their first activity after they have returned to their ancestral home. The historian tells of no adventure on the way. He does not even mention the time which was consumed by the journey of not less than eight hundred miles. After he has recounted at great length the names, the families and the organization of those who returned he passes at once to the end of their journey and tells of their arrival at Jerusalem. It was the seventh month. Since the Jewish year began in the spring this was, therefore, in the autumn and corresponds more nearly to our month of October. The return had been somewhat earlier, for they had taken up their resi-

dence in the cities formerly occupied by their ancestors; but as soon as they had made themselves comfortable and had made a preliminary adjustment of their affairs, they returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the altar and to inaugurate the restored worship of Jehovah. This month was especially propitious for this task, since the seventh month was the most sacred of all the months in the Jewish year. The first day of this month was the feast of trumpets (Num. 29:1); the tenth was the great day of atonement (Lev. 16:29); and the fifteenth was the first day of the feast of tabernacles (Lev. 23:34-44). On the first day of this month, therefore, the altar was erected and the worship was renewed.

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

In the way just described the great altar of burnt offerings was restored, and the daily sacrifice was renewed. It was a recognition of the fact that the altar was the most significant part of the worship.

"In the center of the mosque known as the 'Dome of the Rock,' there is a crag with the well-worn remains of steps leading up to the top of it, and with channels cut in its surface. This has been identified by recent explorers as the site of the great Altar of Burnt Offerings. It is on the very crest of Mount Moriah. Formerly it was thought that it was the site of the inmost shrine of the temple, known as 'the Holy of Holies,' but the new view, which seems to be fairly established, gives an unexpected prominence to the altar. This rude square structure of unhewn stone was the most elevated and conspicuous object in the temple. The altar was to Judaism what the cross is to Christianity. Both for us and for the Jews what is most vital and precious in religion is the dark mystery of a sacrifice. The first work of the temple-builders was to set up the altar again on its old foundation. Before a stone of the temple was laid, the smoke of sacrificial fires might be seen ascending to heaven from the highest crag of Moriah. For fifty years all sacrifices had ceased. Now with haste, in fear of hindrance from jealous neighbors, means were provided to re-establish them before any attempt was made to rebuild the temple. It is not quite easy to see what the writer means when, after saying, 'And they set the altar upon its

bases,' he adds, 'for fear was upon them, because of the people of those countries.' The suggestion that the phrase may be varied so as to mean that the awe which this religious work inspired in the heathen neighbors prevented them from molesting it is far-fetched and improbable. Nor is it likely that the writer intends to convey the idea that the Jews hastened the building of the altar as a sort of palladium, trusting that its sacrifices would protect them in case of invasion, for this is to attribute too materialistic a character to their religion. More reasonable is the explanation that they hastened the work because they feared that their neighbors might either hinder it or wish to have a share in it—an equally objectionable thing, as subsequent events showed."

The writer recounts the different ordinances which were at this time recommenced. There were the daily burnt offerings, the continual burnt offerings, the monthly feasts and at the proper time the feast of tabernacles. All of this, however, was but preparatory to their real task, which was the rebuilding of the temple. Contributions to defray the expense were taken from all classes. The governor, the heads of the houses and the mass of the people each made contributions (Neh. 7:70-72). The first temple was the work of the king, but the second was the task of the people. Some who had no money to give seem to have borne their part by contributing food, drink and oil to secure the necessary supplies from the Lebanon mountains and to pay for the transportation to Jerusalem.

EXPLANATORY.

8. In the second year of their coming: They did not proceed at once on their arrival to building the temple. They waited for this till the spring of the second year. This enabled them to clean

up their fields, vineyards and olive orchards the autumn before and prepare for a crop the second season. Possibly they had reaped the previous harvest. Unto the house of God at Jerusalem:

8 Now in the second year of their coming unto the house of God at Jerusalem, in the second month, began Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and Jeshua the son of Jozadak, and the rest of their brethren the priests and the Levites, and all they that were come out of the captivity unto Jerusalem, and appointed the Levites, from twenty years old and upward, to have the oversight of the work of the house of Jehovah. 9 Then stood Jeshua with his sons and his brethren, Kadmiel

and his sons, the sons of Judah, together, to have the oversight of the workmen in the house of God: the sons of Henadad, with their sons and their brethren the Levites. 10 And when the builders laid the foundation of the temple of Jehovah, they set the priests in their apparel with trumpets and the Levites and sons of Asaph with cymbals, to praise Jehovah, after the order of David king of Israel. 11 And they sang one to another in praising and giving thanks unto Jehovah, *say-*

That is, to the spot where the old temple had been and where the new one was at the time the book of Ezra was written. In the second month: This corresponds to our months of April and May. We do not know how long since their arrival. They built the altar seven months before (3:1). As stated above, possibly they had arrived early enough to gather the harvest of the previous season. This would have enabled them to make the gifts mentioned in v. 7. **Began:** It may be observed that this word has no verb depending on it, so that it is not stated what they began. The thought is that they made a beginning and then appointed the Levites. "They began by appointing," etc. **Zerubbabel:** Two persons and two classes are mentioned. The persons are Zerubbabel and Jeshua. The former is the same as Sheshbazzar. He was the civil leader and belonged to the Davidic family. Jeshua was the head of the priests. The two classes are (1) The priests and Levites, and (2) the rest of the restored community. **Appointed the Levites:** They were made responsible for the building of the temple. They numbered only seventy-four (2:40). **From twenty years old and upward:** Two different ages prevailed at different times as the youngest limit at which a Levite could be required to render service. These ages were twenty-five (Num. 8:24, 25) and twenty (2 Chron.

23:24). The small number of the Levites at this time necessitated the adoption of the younger limit.

9. The previous verse relates that the Levites were appointed to have oversight of the work of building. This verse gives the names of their leaders and states that they discharged their duties unitedly. The Jeshua mentioned here is not the high priest but the Levite mentioned in 2:40. He, his sons and his brethren constitute one group of overseers. Kadmiel and his sons, descendants of an ancestor named Judah (or Hodaviah according to 2:40), constituted another group. The sons of Henadad were a third group. The Levites, in discharge of their duties, stood together or as one (Hebrew); that is, they co-operated with one another.

10. **The builders:** The workmen, not the leaders. **They set the priests, etc.:** The workmen toiled while the priests, vested in their priestly garments, stood by with trumpets, and the musicians, the Levites who were sons of Asaph, made music with cymbals. **After the order of David:** 1 Chron. 25:1-8 contains the account of David setting aside this branch of the Levites to be musicians.

11. **They sang one to another:** Literally *they answered*. This evidently refers to some sort of antiphonal singing in which the choir was divided into two

ing, For he is good, for his lovingkindness *endureth* for ever toward Israel. And all the people shouted with a great shout, when they praised Jehovah, because the foundation of the house of Jehovah was laid. 12 But many of the priests and Levites and heads of fathers' houses, the old men that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice; and many shouted aloud for joy: 13 so that the people could not discern the noise of the shout of joy from the

noise of the weeping of the people; for the people shouted with a loud shout, and the noise was heard afar off.

1 Now when the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard that the children of the captivity were building a temple unto Jehovah, the God of Israel; 2 then they drew near to Zerubbabel, and to the heads of fathers' houses, and said unto them, Let us build with you; for we seek your God, as ye do; and we sacrifice unto him since the days of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, who brought us up hither.

parts and each part would sing responsively. Psalm 136 was one adapted to this kind of singing. For he is good, etc.: This was a refrain which was used on important occasions. It has been supposed that Ps. 136 was used on this occasion, but this is not certain. Jeremiah predicted that there would come a time when instead of the desolation and sadness produced by the overthrow of Jerusalem there should be heard in that place "the voice of joy and the voice of gladness" (Jer. 33:10).

12. Three classes are mentioned as being sad. They are the priests, the Levites and the heads of households. They are then described as old men. That had seen the first house: The temple was destroyed in 588 B. C. This was 536 B. C. A man who at that time was sixty years of age or a little older could distinctly recall the first temple. Haggai speaks of some in his day who could recall the former temple (Hag. 2:3). That was sixteen years later. Persons at that time to remember the temple must have been upward of seventy-five. Wept with a loud voice: This was not the weeping of joy, for joy is noticed in the next clause. Why the grief? It is most natural to understand that they felt that this temple would be insignificant in comparison with Solomon's (Hag. 2:3-9; Zech. 4:10). Other feelings, however, mingled with this: "The

thoughts of the disasters of their youth, the sorrows of their manhood in exile, the gaps in their numbers, the insignificance of the new community by comparison with the splendor of Messianic hopes (Is. 60), were enough to cause sadness and weeping." (Ryle.) Many shouted aloud for joy: These were the younger men, in whom hope was stronger than memory. With them there was furthermore no contrast.

13. Could not discern the noise, etc.: The cry of grief and the shout of joy mingled together and it was not possible for them to be distinguished. Crying and laughter sound quite alike.

4:1. The adversaries of Judah and Benjamin: They are called adversaries by way of anticipation. Nothing here said shows that they had hostile feelings towards the Jews until their proposals were refused. This passage does not state who they were. In verse 4 they are called the people of the land, that is, they were the inhabitants. They were the descendants of captives placed in the land by Esarhaddon and were the people that came to be known as Samaritans.

2. We seek your God as ye do: There is nothing to show that they were animated by an unworthy motive. The basis of their respect is that they worship the same God. The Samaritans were,

3 But Zerubbabel, and Jeshua, and the rest of the heads of fathers' houses of Israel, said unto them, Ye have nothing to do with us in building a house unto our God; but we ourselves together will build unto Jehovah, the God of Israel, as king Cyrus the king of Persia hath

commanded us. 4 Then the people of the land weakened the hands of the people of Judah, and troubled them in building, 5 and hired counsellors against them, to frustrate their purpose, all the days of Cyrus king of Persia, even until the reign of Darius king of Persia.

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to a certain extent, worshipers of Jehovah. The circumstances under which this was brought about are related in 2 Kings 17:21-41. Since the days of Esarhaddon: He was the successor of Sennacherib, king of Assyria, and reigned about one hundred and forty years before. He had planted these colonists in the place of the departed northern tribes.

3. The Samaritans had united idolatrous rites with the worship of Jehovah (2 Kings 17:29-41) and to have permitted them to share in the building would have corrupted the purity of the worship. Our God: This implies that he is not *yours*. This is a denial of the claim of the Samaritans. We ourselves together: This emphasizes the union of the new community and the exclusion of all strangers. As king Cyrus . . . hath commanded us: "The refusal of the application is thus technically based upon the wording of Cyrus' decree; the

applicants failed to come under the permission which Cyrus had granted, and could not, therefore, take part in the work." (Ryle.)

4. Weakened the hands: They pursued a continual policy of harassing the people of Judah and of interfering with their work in every possible way.

5. Hired counsellors against them: This was one method of weakening their hands. They hired officers to make reports unfavorable to the Jews. To frustrate their purpose: That of building the temple. All the days of Cyrus: Eight years after this. Darius king of Persia: There is a much-disputed question of chronology involved in this statement, which need not be entered into here. The reference is probably to the great Darius Hystaspes, who commenced to reign in 522 B. C. The interruption was, therefore, not less than twelve years in duration.

COMMENTS.

Working and Praising. (vs. 10, 11.) While the foundation of the temple was being laid the priests, arrayed in white linen garments, blow their silver trumpets and the Levitical choir clang their brazen cymbals. To the accompaniment of this music they sing psalms of praise in thanksgiving to God. There was nothing soft and soothing like cathedral services about this. "The instruments blare

and clash, the choristers cry aloud, and the people join them with a mighty shout." To sober and serious minded people like the westerners this seems out of place and positively irreverent. This was in keeping, however, with Eastern customs and is a perfectly reasonable way for them to express their gratitude and thanksgiving. The significant fact is that they rejoiced, and this shows

that the Jewish religion could be one of joy.

The Cause of Their Gladness. "When God turned the captivity of Israel, mourning was transformed into laughter. To understand the wild excitement of the Jews, their psalm of joy, their very ecstasy, we must recollect what they had passed through, as well as what they were now anticipating. He must remember the cruel disaster of the overthrow of Jerusalem, the desolation of the exile, the sickness of weary waiting for deliverance, the harshness of the persecution that embittered the later years of the captivity under Nabonadius; we must think of the toilsome pilgrimage through the desert, with its dismal wastes, its dangers and its terrors, followed by the patient work on the land and gathering in of means for building the temple. And now all this was over. The bow had been terribly bent; the rebound was immense. People who can not feel strong religious gladness have never known the heartache of deep religious grief.

"These Israelites had cried out of the depths; they were prepared to shout for joy from the heights. Perhaps we may go further, and detect a finer note in this great blast of jubilation, a note of higher and more solemn gladness. The chastisement of the exile was past, and the long-suffering mercy of God, enduring forever, was again smiling out on the chastened people. And yet the positive realization of their hopes was for the future. The joy, therefore, was inspired by faith. With little accomplished as yet, the sanguine people already saw the temple in their mind's eye, with its massive walls, its cedar chambers, and its adornments of gold and richly-dyed hangings. In the very laying of the foundation their eager imaginations leaped forward to the crowning of the highest pinnacles. Perhaps they saw more; perhaps they perceived, though but dimly, something of the meaning of the spiritual blessedness that had

been foretold by their prophets." (Adeney.)

Their Grief Was Not Well. (vs. 12, 13.) "We can not but think that, after the too common habit of the aged, these mournful old men viewed the past in a glamour of memory, magnifying its splendors as they looked back on them through the mists of time. If so, they were old indeed; for this habit, and not years, makes real old age. He is aged who lives in by-gone days with his face ever set to the irreparable past, vainly regretting its retreating memories, uninterested in the present, despondent of the future. The true elixir of life, the secret of perpetual youth of soul, is interest in the present and the future, with the forward glance of faith and hope. Old men who cultivate this spirit have young hearts though the snow is on their heads. And such are wise. No doubt, from the standpoint of a narrow common sense, with its shrunken views confined to the material and the mundane, the old men who wept had more reason for their conduct than the inexperienced younger men who rejoiced. But there is a prudence that comes of blindness, and there is an imprudence that is sublime in its daring, because it springs from faith. The despair of old age makes one great mistake, because it ignores one great truth. In noting that many good things have passed away, it forgets to remember that God remains, God is not dead! Therefore, the future is safe. In the end the young enthusiasts of Jerusalem were justified. A prophet arose who declared that a glory which the former temple had never known should adorn the new temple, in spite of its humble beginning, and history verified his word when the Lord took possession of his house in the person of his Son."

"Ye Have Nothing to Do with Us." In the attitude of the Jews towards their neighbors who forthwith become adversaries, we have the first act and the first manifestation of Jewish exclusiveness. It is now in the process of beginning. It

was founded in the disposition of mind which led them to keep with such care the genealogical list given in chapter 2 and to search so carefully the ancestry of those returning before they departed from Babylon. It had not gone to such intolerable lengths as later marred the records of the Jewish history. "It can not be harshly censured in this stage of their history, for to have associated with other peoples would have resulted in their being swallowed up in the ocean of idolatry.

A Defense of the Jewish Refusal. "We should show a total lack of the historical spirit if we were to judge the conduct of Zerubbabel and his companions by the broad principles of Christian liberalism. We must take into account their religious training and the measure of light to which they had attained. We must also consider the singularly difficult position in which they were placed. They were not a nation; they were a church. Their very existence, therefore, depended

upon a certain ecclesiastical organization. They must have shaped themselves according to some definite lines, or they would have melted away into the mass of mixed nationalities and debased eclectic religions with which they were surrounded. Whether the course of personal exclusiveness which they chose was wisest and best, may be fairly questioned. It has been the course followed by their children all through the centuries, and it has received this much of justification—it has succeeded. Judaism has been preserved by Jewish exclusiveness. We may think that the essential of Judaism might have been maintained by other means which would have allowed of a more gracious treatment of outsiders. Meanwhile, however, we must see that Zerubbabel and his companions were not simply indulging in churlish unsociability when they rejected the request of their neighbors. Rightly or wrongly, they took this disagreeable course with a great purpose in mind." (Adeney.)

THE LESSON STORY.

It might be well to glance back at what are called the ten great steps in the history of Israel and fix them in the mind for future use. All but one of them had been taken previously to the date of this lesson. The tenth, and the last, was the return from the Babylonian captivity and the re-establishment of the temple worship in Jerusalem. This last step was being made at the time of this lesson, and is the more interesting because it is the last of the series and at the same time marks the final preparation for the Christian era so far as Judaism served to introduce it.

The entire series is as follows: (1) the call of Abraham; (2) the descent into Egypt; (3) the deliverance from Egypt; (4) the giving of the law; (5) the conquest of Canaan; (6) the establishment of the monarchy; (7) the division of the

kingdom; (8) the overthrow of the Northern kingdom; (9) the fall of Jerusalem and the Babylonian captivity; (10) the return from the captivity and the re-establishment of their own temple worship in the capital of Judah.

All the Jewish history preceding Christianity is easily and profitably grouped along the line of these events. The ten epochs should be committed to memory for future use.

Zerubbabel was a grandson of king Zehoiachin and an heir of the promises that centered in the family of David. When Cyrus allowed the exiles to return to their own land, Sheshbazzar was made the nominal governor of the new colony. Zerubbabel, however, who succeeded him, was from the first the real leader especially in restoring the ancient worship and in rebuilding the temple. His life marks the return of God's chosen but broken

nation from their exile in Babylon, and the beginning of their history under foreign dominion. Their career thus begun continued under various rulers until the destruction of Jerusalem by the Romans in A. D. 70.

The beginning of the new Israel, historically speaking, was brought about through the conquests of Cyrus. They led to the fall of Babylon in 538 B. C. Two years later, or fifty years after the destruction of Jerusalem, in 586 B. C., Cyrus gave liberty to all the exiled peoples in his empire to return to their own lands. Only a portion of the Jews availed themselves of the privilege, but those who did so were persons in whom the long discipline of the exile had begotten a spirit of intense religious and patriotic zeal. This return not only encouraged the poverty-stricken Jews who had been left in the land, but prompted numerous refugees to return from Egypt and other countries to which they had fled at the fall of Jerusalem. Before any public work could be accomplished, houses had to be built and neglected fields had to be plowed and sowed. Not until the seventh month were the priests able to erect an altar where the old one had stood and to reinstate the evening and morning sacrifices. Seven months later the foundations of the temple were laid with deep but varied emotions. In this work of restoration Zerubbabel took the most conspicuous and important part. The intense exclusiveness of the returned captives

aroused the bitterest hostility of their Samaritan neighbors who, on the plea that they, too, worshiped Jehovah, wanted to help in rebuilding his temple. One result was an interruption of the work that lasted for fifteen years. Finally Zerubbabel and his associates, encouraged by the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, resumed the task and completed it in about twenty years after the return.

It must have been a strange experience when the children of the captivity, coming home after fifty years, home to the marvelous city of their childhood, or the famous capital wherein their ancestors rejoiced, to find its walls broken down, its buildings burned, its streets neglected and the site of the temple desolate. All the glory of its golden days of prosperity had faded. Poverty, barrenness, desolation! But they were encouraged by the fact that God in his compassion would be with them. Thus many a man whose health and character have been wrecked through sin returns to the Lord "who will have mercy upon him," and to his God who will "abundantly pardon." There is hope in Jehovah for all returning captives. No wonder that the old men wept who had seen the former temple. Thus men weep over their broken childhood altars. But with the sound of the weeping are mingled the voices of faith and hope and rejoicing. For in Christ the golden days are yet to come—days when with hearts chastened through sorrow men shall no longer desire to wander and forsake God.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What king favored the return of the Jews to Jerusalem and why?
2. What charge did Cyrus say God had given to him?
3. How long since these Jews had been taken into captivity?
4. What practical encouragement did Cyrus give the Jews to return?
5. What encouragement did those "round about" offer them to return?
6. What seemed to be the supreme

motive in their return to Jerusalem?

7. What was the Golden Text of our last lesson?
8. Who were the three leaders of the three companies of returning captives? (See Lesson Introduction.)
9. Describe the three pilgrimages or returns from Babylonish captivity. (See lesson Introduction.)
10. Upon the return of the captives to Judah where did they dwell? Ezra. 2:70.

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. What is said as to the time and unity of gathering in Jerusalem? Ezra. 3:1.
2. What did the leaders build at first and why? Ezra. 3:2.
3. What is intimated as one reason why the people set up the altar promptly? Ezra 3:3.
4. What feast is mentioned particularly as being kept in the seventh month? Ezra 3:4. Compare Neh. 8:14.
5. After the feast of tabernacles what offerings were made? Ezra 3:5.
6. To whom did the people give money, food and oil, and why? Ezra 3:7.
7. Who were appointed to have the oversight of the work of the temple? Ezra 3:8.
8. Why were trumpets and cymbals used at the time of laying the foundation? Ezra 3:10.
9. What words did they employ in singing one to another? Ezra 3:11.
10. What did all the people do "because the foundation of the house of Jehovah was laid?" Ezra 3:11.
11. But many of the priests and Levites—old men—did what? Ezra 3:12.
12. What confusion was caused and how on this occasion? Ezra 3:13.
13. When the adversaries of Judah and Benjamin heard the temple was being rebuilt what did they request and on what ground? Ezra 4:1,2.
14. What was the answer returned by the leaders of the Jews? Ezra 4:3.
15. Then what evil retaliation was made by the adversaries? Ezra 4:4.
16. How long did their adversaries continue to annoy them? Ezra 4:5.
17. What did they write concerning the Jews and to whom? Ezra 4:6.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. Before the Jews could lay the temple foundation they established the altar for the burnt offerings and began the worship of God in Jerusalem. Worship does not depend upon a church building or temple. Anywhere one may worship God in spirit and truth. Jesus so taught the woman of Samaria. We do not offer lambs or bullocks on altars of wood or stone. Our offering is a contrite heart, the devotion of the body, as a living sacrifice, our spiritual and reasonable service. We may give ourselves and lose ourselves as Christ lost himself that we may indeed find and save ourselves at last.

2. There is a temple greater far than that which stood on the hill in old Jerusalem. Its living stones are obedient followers of Christ. They are built upon him as the only foundation. Our individ-

ual bodies, also, are temples of the Holy Spirit. If we love Christ we will keep his words and he will make his abode with us. Christ in us is our hope of glory. He stands at the door of every lukewarm heart asking entrance and welcome and promising sweet fellowship and gracious communion with all who will open the door and let him come in.

3. Although some of the old priests and Levites who had seen the first temple wept at the sight of the foundation of the second, I am sure there can be no regret to the Christian over any superior glory of Christ in the past, contrasted with any inferior glory of the Christ today, for there never has been a time when his glory on earth was more potent or promising than it now is. God's plans for his children unfold with the years and grow better as we learn their meaning.

A PSALM OF DELIVERANCE.

Psalm 85.

GOLDEN TEXT—Jehovah hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.
Psa. 126:3.

Memory Verses—10, 11. **Suggested Reading**—Psa. 121, 122, 126. **Time**—After
538 B. C., probably about 520. **Persons**—The Psalmist and his people.

DAILY READINGS.

Oct. 23.....M—Psa. 85:1-13—A Psalm of Deliverance.
Oct. 24.....T—Psa. 137:1-9—The Song of Captivity.
Oct. 25.....W—Psa. 126:1-6—The Joy of the Returned.
Oct. 26.... T—Psa. 122:1-9—Rejoicing in God's House.
Oct. 27.... F—Psa. 124:1-8—Our Soul is Escaped from the Fowling.
Oct. 28.....S—Isa. 40:1-31—Comfort ye, Comfort ye, My People.
Oct. 29.....S—Zeph. 3:1-20—"Sing, O Daughter of Zion."

THE BOOK OF PSALMS.

The book of Psalms was the hymn book of the Jewish people. The collection is spoken of as the Psalms of David. It should not be inferred from this that David wrote all of them, or that the Scripture so teach. That David was one of the earlier poets and one of the inspirers of Hebrew poetry can not reasonably be questioned. That many of the Psalms are from his pen there is no compelling reason to doubt. But other men wrote Psalms and some editor collected the best of them and published them. It would perhaps be more accurate to say editors, for our book of Psalms consists of five books. The eighty-fifth Psalm is the thirteenth Psalm of the third

book. It was not written by David, but belongs to a later age.

The influence of the Psalms can not be accurately estimated. They cultivated the heart of Judaism and show a phase of its religious life which is a happy contrast to the dry, legalistic spirit of the scribes, the Pharisees and the traditions of the elders. They made the spirit and worship of the Israelites unique among the nations about them (Psa. 137:3). They were the first hymn book of the Christian Church and have never failed to sweeten and enrich the stream of Christian poetry. Better still, they have led many a devout soul into closer fellowship with God and have taught multitudes to find joy in their religion and to know that God is good and gracious.

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

"The restoration of Israel from exile is a proof that God has forgiven his people and taken them back into favor as he promised (Jer. 33:8 ff.). Yet the

present condition of Israel seems to show that God's anger still rests upon it. Only a feeble remnant has returned. Disappointment and disasters are crushing

1 Jehovah, thou hast been favorable
unto thy land;

Thou hast brought back the captivity
of Jacob.

them. The national life has not revived. The great hopes held out by the prophets, especially in Is. 40:66, in connection with the return, have not been realized. And, therefore, the nation prays for a fresh manifestation of God's saving power to gladden his people (1-7).

"Listening for an answer, the Psalmist receives the assurance that God's purposes of good toward his faithful people will surely be fulfilled. He will dwell among them and bless them, fulfilling the prophetic promises of the establishment of his kingdom among men (8-13).

"Such is the argument of the Psalm; and we can hardly be wrong in referring it to the early days of the return from Babylon. The best illustration of it is to be found in the prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah, especially in Zech. 1; 12ff., and with this period (c. B. C. 520) it should be connected, rather than with the time of Nehemiah. It was written to meet the depression and despondency which were rapidly crushing the life out of the feeble church of the restoration, with the assurance that the prophetic promises of a glorious Messianic future were not a delusion, but that God would

establish his kingdom in his land. Thought and language show familiarity with Is. 40-56.

"The Psalm falls into two divisions, (1) the pleading of mercies already received (1-3) as the ground of prayer (4-7), and (2) the answer of hope (8-13); and it has been suggested that the first part was to be sung by the people, the second by the priest. At any rate vs. 1-7 may express the thoughts of the people; vs. 8-13 the inspired conviction of some 'soul of nobler tone,' prophet or priest, who wrote the Psalm . . . It is full of Messianic hopes. The incarnation is the true answer to the prayer of Israel; and in Christ almost every word of the second part finds its fulfillment. The message of peace (Luke 2:14), the nearness of salvation (Matt. 1:21; Luke 2:30 ff.), the divine glory dwelling in the earth (Luke 2:33; John 1:14), the union of lovingkindness and truth, of righteousness and peace (John 7:17; Rom. 5:1), the advent of God preceded by righteousness making a way for his people to walk in: these blessings were imparted in Christ in a fullness and a reality far transcending anything that the Psalmist could have anticipated." (Kirkpatrick.)

EXPLANATORY.

1. Jehovah: This Psalm, like many of the other Psalms, is a prayer. This is its invocation. The prayer continues to the end of v. 7. **Thou hast been favorable:** God has been kindly disposed to his people. He had bestowed upon them a blessing (restored them after the captivity) and this was proof that he was well disposed to them. There were times in the nation's history when this was not God's attitude. A long course of stubborn sinfulness had the effect of turning him away from them. He speaks

through Jeremiah on one occasion and says, "Jehovah doth not accept them; now will he remember their iniquity, and visit their sins." The prophet is even forbidden to pray for their good, and their own worship will not be accepted (14:10-12). Psalm 77:7 contains language which indicates that God was unfavorable when he had *cast off* his people. This Psalm justly regards the return from captivity as proof that God had found that in them which propitiated him, rendered him favorable. **Thy**

2 Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of thy people;
Thou hast covered all their sin.

[Selah.]

3 Thou hast taken away all thy wrath;
Thou hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger.

4 Turn us, O God of our salvation,
And cause thine indignation toward us to cease.

5 Wilt thou be angry with us for ever?
Wilt thou draw out thine anger to all generations?

land: Not the land apart from the people, but, as the context shows, the people who are the inhabitants of the land. **Thou has brought back the captivity:** This was the evidence of God's attitude towards them and was at the same time his favor to them. **Brought back:** The margin has *returned to*. That is, after casting them off for a time (Ps. 137:7) he has now returned to aid them. Both readings convey the idea of God's favor. **The captivity of Jacob:** While this expression is used in some passages to denote a general deliverance from calamity, it most naturally refers to the deliverance from the Babylonian captivity.

2. **Thou hast forgiven:** The Hebrew words mean that God has carried away the burden which they were carrying, namely, their iniquity. **The iniquity of thy people:** Here sin is described by a word which denotes "depravity or moral distortion." **Thou has covered their sin:** The forgiveness of sin is sometimes represented as the covering up of sin. It was the duty of the judge to avenge any wrong which he saw. As long as the sin is exposed it may meet his eye and call forth his vengeance. God covers it and so removes it out of sight. The word for sin is the most usual biblical term and means a wandering from the way, or a missing the mark. **Selah:** "Various explanations have been proposed as to the etymology and meaning of this term. Perhaps the least improbable of these is that which regards it as a liturgical direction intended to indicate the

place for *lifting up* the voices in a doxology at the end of a section. Or it may have been a direction to the orchestra to strike in with loud music during a pause in the singing." In our reading of the Psalms it should be ignored altogether.

3. **Thou hast taken away all thy wrath:** Sometimes God is represented as pouring out his wrath upon sinners, as in 2 Chron. 12:7. Here we find the opposite idea. He has *withdrawn* or *removed* it from them. **The fierceness of thine anger:** Hebrew poetry expresses the same truth in parallel lines, but in different ways. This second line is but a repetition of the thought in the previous one.

4-7. The first three verses have stated the fact of God's grace and forgiveness without any qualifications. If we were to consider these verses alone we should think that their condition left nothing to be desired. But verses 4-7 show that in spite of the restoration and his forgiveness, much is still lacking. The Psalmist goes on to pray that God will entirely remove his wrath and bestow upon them the full measure of their salvation.

4. **Turn us:** An expression repeatedly occurring in the Psalms and meaning *restore us* from captivity. **Cause thine indignation, etc.:** God is not yet wholly favorable. Cf. v. 1.

5. For the thought expressed in these questions in a still more despairing form

6 Wilt thou not quicken us again,
That thy people may rejoice in thee?
7 Show us thy lovingkindness, O Jehovah,
And grant us thy salvation.
8 I will hear what God Jehovah will
speak;
For he will speak peace unto his
people, and to his saints:
But let them not turn again to folly.

9 Surely his salvation is nigh them
that fear him,
That glory may dwell in our land.
10 Mercy and truth are met together;
Righteousness and peace have kissed
each other.
11 Truth springeth out of the earth;
And righteousness hath looked down
from heaven.

see Ps. 77:7-9. They had waited long and it seemed that God had wholly abandoned them.

6. **Quicken us again:** In one of his best-known and most striking passages the prophet Ezekiel represents the house of Israel as a valley of dry bones (Ez. 37:1-14). The time was to come when the dry bones should be clothed again in flesh and restored to life. For this time the Psalmist prays.

7. **Show us thy lovingkindness:** This is a prayer that God may cause them to see his lovingkindness by exhibiting it to them. This is one of God's most delightful and gracious attributes and is often praised in the Psalms. It is the cause, while salvation is its effect.

8. **The Psalmist now puts himself in a new attitude.** It is that of waiting, listening for God to speak, yet it is a waiting which is full of confidence that the answer will be favorable. This attitude of the writer continues till the end of the Psalm. **For he will speak peace:** His reason why he listens for God's answer; it will be quite worth while to hear it. **To his people and to his saints:** They are one and the same class. The primary idea of the word for *saint* is one who is the object of God's lovingkindness. "In its primary sense, then, the word implies no moral praise or merit; but it came not unnaturally to be connected with the idea of loving-

kindness between man and man and to be used of the character which reflected that love of which it was itself the object." (Kirkpatrick.) **Let them not turn again to folly:** This would destroy the Psalmist's confidence of God's favorable answer.

9. **Surely, etc.:** This is an element of the Psalmist's faith. Since God is a God of righteousness it can not be in the very nature of things but that his salvation is near to them that fear him. **That glory, etc.:** God's very nature and his covenant alike pledge him to this purpose. "Glory" is the manifest presence of God. Ezekiel saw a vision of it (Ez. 1:23), and later it departed from Jerusalem (10:18), but the faith of the Psalmist leads him to believe that this abandonment of the city shall not last forever. His returning to the land will be salvation for those that fear him.

10. The divine attributes of mercy, truth, righteousness and peace conspire together to effect the work of salvation for the new community. In this respect God is ever the same, he changes not. All of these divine attributes are combined in the producing of salvation through Christ.

11. Truth must dwell in man's heart, and it will spring up as a natural growth in response to the manifestation of God's righteousness. The idea of this verse seems to be that human virtue will be

12 Yea, Jehovah will give that which
is good;

And our land shall yield its increase.

13 Righteousness shall go before him,
And shall make his footsteps a way
to walk in.

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attracted by the divine righteousness. The one springs up to meet the other as it descends from heaven.

12. This verse continues the same thought and enlarges it. Not only will human virtue be manifested in response to God's virtue, but hand in hand with it will be material prosperity. Here, as well as in Ezekiel 47 (see lesson for Oc-

tober 8), is taught the truth that the fruitfulness of the land will attend God's manifestation to his people.

13. Righteousness shall go before him: The righteousness of God is personified and represented as a herald. It will mark out his path for him and his people may walk in it and reach him and his salvation.

COMMENTS.

The Reason for the Return. Why were the people of Judah recalled from their captivity? Many other nations were exiled during this period of the great world empires, but possibly no other people returned and continued their history with so slight a break as the people of Jerusalem. There must be a reason for this, and that reason is found in this Psalm. It presupposes a God and that he exercises his providence to promote righteousness among men. The reason for the return may be analyzed and most of its important elements find expression in the words of our Psalmist. They were a people who had profound reliance upon God and deeply appreciated his acts of grace on their behalf (vs. 1-3). Though the prophets rebuke them for the absence of this feeling of gratitude, its presence in them was conspicuous when we contrast them with other peoples. Again, they felt keenly the loss of God's presence or of his blessings (vs. 4-7). They likewise had a keen appreciation of the heinousness of sin (v. 8). Forgiveness for sins is a primary condition of well-being and even of life itself. Finally this Psalm shows that

they had a high conception of the moral loftiness and righteousness of God's character.

The Loss Involved in Sin. These people realized that sin deprived them of God's favor, and their moral natures were so well developed that they felt that every material loss and deprivation was a sign of the withdrawal of God's favor, and hence of the presence of sin. Sin, they felt, withheld many good things from them. They had a very keen sense of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Possibly no recent age has been so illy prepared to sympathize with them in this as our own. It is not characteristic of our generation to look upon sin with horror and aversion. We may lay claim to taking an interest in the sinner and to devising many schemes and institutions for his amelioration, but the sin which has brought him to this condition we gloss over as a heritage from his ancestors, or a result of his environment. We are apt to say that it is his misfortune, but the Jewish writer did not hesitate to say that it was his shame and his disgrace. The long, dark Babylonian captivity was due to sin, and its removal

could only mean that God, in his infinite grace, had forgiven the sin.

Waiting for the Lord. (v. 8.) Human attitude towards God is often represented as a waiting upon the Lord. This is a representation that within certain limits is good, but as to whether the attitude is commendable depends upon the object of the waiting. Many of our modern hymns speak of a waiting which is not praiseworthy. It is a waiting for God's salvation, and such a waiting as is antagonistic to working. The Psalmist, in this case, represents the godly man as waiting to hear what God will speak, but coupled with it is an effort to keep himself from sin and folly. Such an attitude of waiting is entirely praiseworthy.

High Morality. These Psalmists exalted righteousness even as they hated sin. Their poetic genius was never degraded to low or base immorality. To them God is ever merciful and kind, the outward world but the declaration of his power and goodness; and if a man is degraded he has become so by his own act. Their genius never sang the song of sensuality, as did that of Burns and Byron. Their poetic faculty never drooped in despondency, as did that of Shelley. Though the Psalmist may at times mourn

over the material prosperity of the wicked, yet he saw that in the end there would be a triumph of God's righteousness.

Religion of Primary Importance. To the Psalmist religion was the one thing worthy of their poetic genius, and poetry was always the handmaiden of religion. We can scarcely conceive of one of these men writing in any but the loftiest religious strain. Neither were they more religious when the sun shone fair or when they were beneath the clashing strain of the temple music, but always the same, always devout. This was because to them God was all in all. Rather would they doubt the experiences of their own life than to doubt his existence or his goodness.

Milton's Ode. One passage in Milton's "Ode on the Nativity" must have been inspired by the thought and language of v. 11.

"Yea truth and justice then
Will down return to men
Orb'd in a rainbow; and, like glories wear-
ing
Mercy, will sit between,
Throned in celestial sheen,
With radiant feet the tissued clouds down
steering;
And heaven, as at some festival,
Will open wide the gates of her high palace
hall."

THE LESSON STORY.

It would hardly be possible to turn this psalm into a story, and yet is it not a kind of spiritual story? Are not spiritual stories the most important of all? We may not be sure who wrote the sentences, or where or when they were composed, but if we find in them the story of our own religion or the story of another's inner life richer than our own we shall be delighted and profited. It sounds like the prayer of a patriot for his country who mentions former blessings, but believes that brighter days are yet to come. It is good to feel truly that

the Lord has been favorable and has brought us back from captivity in folly and sin. Six items are named in which Jehovah is said to have wrought kindness to the people. Thou hast been favorable to the land, hast brought back from captivity; hast forgiven iniquity; hast not only forgiven, hast also covered all their sin, hidden it forever from view, blotted it out like a thick cloud never to mention it any more; hast taken away all thy wrath; hast turned thyself from the fierceness of thine anger. To have been favored, restored, forgiven, and de-

livered from the wrath of God's holiness—what a precious cluster of blessings to look back upon and remember! With the memory of such grace it is a joy to turn to the future and hope and pray for increasing blessings.

"Turn us" is a necessary prayer when we have not the power or disposition to turn ourselves. When following unholy impulses, anger, avarice, pleasures of sin, and strengthening in ourselves the habit of sin, we should pray all the more earnestly, "Turn us, O God of our salvation."

Salvation, as Jonah learned, is of the Lord. It was the Lord himself, with a high and outstretched hand, who delivered the children of Israel out of the bondage to Pharaoh. Jeremiah says, "It is not in man that walketh to direct his steps." But Solomon says: "In all thy ways acknowledge him and he will direct thy paths." The Psalmist David says: "A man's goings are established of Jehovah; and he delighted in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for Jehovah upholdeth him with his hand."

The petitions are: "Turn us," "cause thine indignation toward us to cease," "Show us thy lovingkindness and grant us thy salvation."

How beautiful the petition, "Show us thy lovingkindness, O Jehovah, and grant us thy salvation"! Has not God sought always to show to all who have eyes to see his lovingkindness? Did not Jesus come to reveal it? Did he not bring salvation? Often, in our prayers, we petition for that which our Father is more willing to grant than we are to ask. After all, our prayers are not for the purpose of overcoming God's reluctance to bless, but rather to overcome our own unfitness to receive his blessing. He loves us better than we love ourselves and infinitely more wisely. He desires our

highest possible interests more than we desire them ourselves.

It is wise to pause in the midst of our prayers and say, as did the psalmist: "I will hear what God Jehovah will speak; for he will speak peace unto his people." When we read the Scriptures we hear God speaking. When we pray we hear ourselves. We should be always "swift to hear and (in comparison with hearing God) slow to speak." God dwells in heaven and we upon the earth. Therefore (says Solomon) our words should be few. It is better to know Jesus Christ through his word than to pray to him in ignorance. Peter in his epistles dwells much upon the importance of knowing the Lord. His last counsel is: "Grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." "To him be the glory both now and forever." Yes, "I will hear what God Jehovah will speak, for he will speak peace unto his people!" "My peace I give unto you." "Come unto me and I will give you rest."

Attention has often been called to the four choice words in verses tenth and eleventh: "Mercy and truth," "righteousness and peace." The former two "are met together;" the latter two "have kissed each other." Mercy is first, as the *motive* of salvation; truth is second, as the necessary *means*. Righteousness goes *before* in regeneration and peace comes *after*. But there are two other pairs here beautiful in their union. The first is "salvation" and "glory"; and the last is "truth" and "righteousness." "Truth springeth out of the earth and righteousness hath looked down from heaven." The two correspond as the seed corresponds to the sunlight.

It is a high conception of the psalmist concerning our Lord that: "Righteousness shall go before him and shall make his footsteps a way to walk in." There may be thorns along with roses, but the end shall be peace.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. Under whose leadership did the returned exiles take their first important public action, and what was it? Ezra 3:1-6.

2. What was their next great undertaking in Jerusalem? Ezra 3:7-9.

3. How did they celebrate the laying of the foundation of the temple?

4. What conflicting emotions stirred the multitude?

5. What assistance was offered at

this time by the Samaritans? Ezra 4:1, 2.

6. What reply did Zerubbabel and the elders make to the offer? Ezra 4:3.

7. What resulted from the spirit of exclusiveness on the part of the Jews?

8. What induced Zerubbabel to resume the work after interruption? Ezra 5:1, 2.

9. What charge and promise did the prophet Haggai give him? Hag. 2:1-9.

10. How did the prophet Zechariah encourage him to go on? Zech. 4:5-10.

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. What general and specific kindness did the psalmist ascribe to God? Ps. 85:1.

2. What deeper and greater benefits did he then mention? Ps. 85:2.

3. What had God taken away and from what had he turned? Ps. 85:3.

4. What turn especially was needed to cause divine indignation to cease? Ps. 85:4.

5. What is really meant by the anger of God toward us? Ps. 85:5. See Mark 3:5.

6. What especially do worshipers need and how accomplished? Ps. 85:6; Ps. 119:50.

7. What may be inferred as to the expected effect of quickening? Ps. 85:6.

8. For what two blessings does the psalmist next pray? Ps. 85:7.

9. What wise resolve did the psalmist make? Ps. 85:8.

10. What did he say God would speak, and what should his saints avoid? Ps. 85:8.

11. What firm conviction did he utter concerning them that fear God? Ps. 85:9.

12. What happy union or friendship did the psalmist mention? Ps. 85:10.

13. What further union between the earth and heaven did he name? Ps. 85:11.

14. What confidence and assurance did he declare? Ps. 85:12.

15. What quality in God is emphasized in particular? Ps. 85:13.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. "Truth shall spring out of the earth." Promises which lie like seed buried in the soil will grow and yield harvests of joy; and men shall learn to be true one to another. God looks down in grace; man looks up in obedience.

Jesus answers to the declaration that "Truth shall spring out of the earth," says Spurgeon. Here in verse nine and ten we have a veiled intimation of the coming of the Word of God. In times of deep apostasy, when faithful

hearts would be looking for the promise which had so long tarried, He would bring salvation and glory, even the glory of his presence, tabernacling among men.

2. The captivity is broken. The captives have returned to the city of their God. The real captivity is the captivity to Satan and sin. An old writer says quaintly: "Satan is the jailer, the flesh is our prison, ungodly lusts are the manacles, a bad conscience the tormentor, all of them against us; only Christ is Em-

manuel, God with us; he turneth away our captivity in forgiving all our offences and in covering all our sins "

3. The forgiveness of sin is fully guaranteed in Christ to all who will accept and obey him. "Thou shalt call his name Jesus, for he shall save his people from their sins." He will not save men in, or in spite of, willful sin, but from their sins, and will deliver them out of their sins as one is delivered out of captivity. He himself will lead captivity captive and give his marvelous gifts unto men. His Spirit is his chief gift. These pilgrims did not see the Christ, but they saw shadows of his coming. The Spirit signified the Messiah in the prophecies of old, which even the prophets themselves could not understand. The "God of our salvation" is Jesus. He who quickens is Christ. To

quicken is to make alive. His very words are spirit and are life. Jesus was angry, being grieved because of the hardness of the people's hearts. Oh, how deep and sore is his grief when his disciples love and follow sin! If men only realized how their sins grieve the Holy Spirit, they would be more heroic against them.

4. The readiness to hear "what God Jehovah will speak" is a commendable and hopeful attitude for the sinner. Jesus came to make known the words of life. One must hear and understand God's message. "He will speak peace unto his people." Jesus said, "My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you." His peace abides which the world cannot destroy. He himself is "Our Peace." In him "righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

ESTHER PLEADING FOR HER PEOPLE

Esther 4:1—5:3. (Print 4:10—5:3.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Jehovah preserveth all them that love him. Psa. 145:20

Memory Verses—4:13, 14. Suggested Reading—The Book of Esther. Time—About 474 B. C. Place—Shushan, the palace. Persons—Esther, Hathach, Mordecai and Ahasuerus.

DAILY READINGS.

Oct. 30.... M—Esther 1:1—2:23—Esther Chosen Queen.
 Oct. 31..... T—Esther 3:1-15—Haman's Plot to Destroy the Jews.
 Nov. 1..... W—Esther 4:1-17—Esther's Noble Resolve.
 Nov. 2..... T—Esther 5:1—6:14—The Banquet for the King and Haman.
 Nov. 3..... F—Esther 7:1-10—Haman Hanged on His Own Gallows.
 Nov. 4..... S—Esther 8:1-17—The Saving of the Jews.
 Nov. 5..... S—Esther 9:1—10:3—The Commemorating Feast.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Shushan is the same as the Greek Susa. Earlier it was the capital of Elam and later one of the capitals of the Persian Empire, and because it was the royal residence it is called the palace.

It was occupied by the king in the winter and Ecbatana was his summer residence. At the time of its capture by the Persians it was destroyed, but was rebuilt by Darius.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

The story of Esther belongs to the time when the Persian king Xerxes reigned, for this is the name by which he is known to history rather than by the biblical name of Ahasuerus. Xerxes reigned from 485 to 465 B. C. The Greek historian Herodotus has described this king, and his invasion of Greece has made his name familiar to all students of ancient history. The picture of this monarch, as it is given by the Greek historian, corresponds remarkably well with that of him presented in the book of Esther. In both he is represented as acting childishly. In his Grecian campaign he decorated a tree with jewelry as a reward for its fruitfulness, and had the Hellespont flogged and *chained* as a punishment for its tempestuousness. In the story of Esther the same king

is nothing more than a mere tool of his courtiers and palace servants. The one that is most clever in gaining his presence and in stating his desires, the faction that first suggests to him its disguised scheme against its rival is the one that, for the time being, is in the ascendancy. The first chapter tells of a plot by which he is deprived of his favorite wife. Haman, moved by personal spite, poisons his mind against a section of his subjects. The women of the harem are alone able to prevent their wholesale slaughter. Even they, in their seclusion, know more about the actual state of affairs than he. When the plot is unmasked to his bewildered mind, he does not know how to undo the work of his own folly. He weakly and helplessly hands over the symbols of his au-

thority to Esther and trusts her to circumvent his mistake. He was nominally absolute and exalted above his realm; in reality he was the tool of any servant of his who had the cunning to plot and flatter, and the hardihood to play the game, for Ahasuerus possessed the power of life and death over his subjects

and in his fury he did not shrink from using it. The time of Esther is coincident with the events told in the book of Ezra. Her choice as queen came within the sixty years which intervene between the close of the sixth and the beginning of the seventh chapters of the latter book.

THE BOOK OF ESTHER.

The purpose of this book is apparent. It was to give an account of the origin of the Jewish feast of Purim. This was a feast that was not of divine appointment and was in fact objected to by some of the stricter Jews on the ground that it was an innovation not sanctioned by the law. Their objections, however, were not successful in preventing its observance. The feast is more social and patriotic than religious, and the book of Esther is largely used in the services of Purim. It is read through entirely during the synagogue service of this feast, even to the present day. The book has some peculiar and striking features which make it unlike any other book of the Old Testament. These features have

made it objectionable to many of all classes. It was not without difficulty that it was adopted into the Jewish canon. Some of the early Christian fathers omitted it. Luther wished that it and 2 Maccabees did not exist. The main ground of these objections is that the book is non-religious in character. The name of God is not mentioned. It is almost without the religious element and the didactic purpose is entirely lacking. It makes no allusion to Jerusalem, Palestine, the temple and the priesthood. But, like every other historical narrative, it proclaims truths and leads us to admire noble characters and despise unworthy ones.

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

Ahasuerus gave a great feast to which were invited all his nobles and rulers. In the midst of the drunken revelry the king ordered his eunuchs to bring his queen into the banquet room, that her beauty might be admired by all. She refused to come. Our sympathy is naturally with the wronged queen in her brave stand, but for this she was deposed. The resources of the empire are now employed to secure a successor. Many candidates were offered and the king himself was to be the judge. Among the maidens whose relatives aspired to have filling the vacant place was a Jewish damsel, Esther, and she was chosen

for the vacant place. Her Jewish extraction, however, was concealed. A palace plot to kill the king became known to him through her and her kinsman, Mordecai. A certain officer of the court by the name of Haman was at this time the royal favorite and was promoted to the first place next to the king. For some unknown reason, Mordecai, Esther's kinsman, refused to pay him the reverence due his office. This enraged Haman and he plotted, not only against Mordecai, but against all the Jews. No less a slaughter than this would soothe his wounded pride. The king fell into the snare and empowered Haman to order

10 Then Esther spake unto Hathach, and gave him a message unto Mordecai, *saying*: 11 All the king's servants, and the people of the king's provinces, do know, that whosoever, whether man or woman, shall come unto the king into the inner court, who is not called, there is one law for him, that he be put to death, except those to whom the king

shall hold out the golden sceptre, that he may live: but I have not been called to come in unto the king these thirty days. 12 And they told to Mordecai Esther's words.

13 Then Mordecai bade them return answer unto Esther, Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. 14 For

a general execution of the Jews. Mordecai, in true oriental manner, gave way to public grief, and through the eunuch

that had charge of Esther, communicated the details of the plot to her. At this point the lesson begins.

EXPLANATORY.

10. Esther spake unto Hathach: Hathach is described as one of the king's chamberlains (v. 5). He was a servant in the woman's quarter and was assigned especially to Esther. She was not permitted to see Mordecai, and so she used Hathach as the medium of communication with him.

11. All . . . do know, etc.: This must have been known to Mordecai before he received Esther's message. It shows that Mordecai in urging this upon her had a high sense of duty and patriotism. He felt that a Jew should be willing to pay any price to protect the people of his own blood. **Into the inner court:** The outer court, the place of waiting, might be thronged with visitors waiting their turn to see the king, but they might not pass from it into the inner court before the presence of the king without his permission. **There is one law for him, etc.:** Herodotus confirms this statement made by Esther. A person might request an audience. No satisfactory answer has been suggested as to why Esther did not seek the presence of the king in this way. It is probable that such a step taken by a woman would have been regarded as more unbecoming than the one Esther did take. **The golden scepter:** "In all the numer-

ous representations of Persian kings at Persepolis there is not one in which the monarch does not hold a long, tapering staff in his right hand." This is probably the scepter mentioned by Esther. **I have not been called, etc.:** The king tires of a new favorite, or at least forgets her for others. When we consider the lonely life of a woman in the harem, her constant attitude of waiting for the summons that rarely came, we can not feel that her lot is at all to be envied, though she were indeed the queen of a great realm. But such a position was a real honor in the eyes of an ancient oriental. Herodotus says that the wives of the king came to his presence by turns. In some cases their number was more than 300.

13. **Think not, etc.:** The same vindictive hatred which has sought the death of the Jews will not rest till she has fallen, too. Though she had concealed her nationality and her relation to Mordecai from the king, these were known to her attendants, and will not escape the knowledge of Haman.

14. **Then will relief and deliverance arise:** There is here an avowal of belief in destiny, and one is almost tempted to add of Providence. This is the place where the thought of God comes nearer

if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then will relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house will perish: and who knoweth whether thou art not come to the kingdom for such a time as this? 15 Then Esther bade them return answer unto Mordecai, 16 Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night or day: I also and my maidens will fast in like manner; and so will I go in unto

the king, which is not according to the law: and if I perish, I perish. 17 So Mordecai went his way, and did according to all that Esther had commanded him.

1 Now it came to pass on the third day, that Esther put on her royal apparel, and stood in the inner court of the king's house, over against the king's house: and the king sat upon his royal throne in the royal house, over against the entrance of the house. 2 And it was so, when the king saw Esther the queen

to expression than anywhere else in the book, yet it is suppressed. There must have been a reason for this suppression. It is probably because the book was intended for circulation among non-Jews, and the author felt that the mention of the name of the Jew's God would prejudice them against it. Thou and thy father's house will perish: This probably means that a divine vengeance will overtake her for neglecting the purpose for which she was raised up.

15. Return answer to Mordecai: She undertakes, at the command of Mordecai, the dangerous task. She is to assume the role of champion for a race that is in imminent peril. She has meekly accepted the task because he has urged it as her duty, but it is not probable that she would have attempted it if her own conscience had not seconded his suggestion. Herein was the strength of his influence over her. It was not merely that she had been accustomed to obey him, but because she knew it was right, and her protestation was only her womanly shrinking from danger.

16. The marvel is that so much stress is laid upon fasting and no word is said about prayer. At a later time we shall study of a man who had to make a request of another Persian king which was possible of misconstruction, just as this one of Esther's was, but he strength-

ened himself by a sudden outpouring of secret prayer. The Jewish author of this book must have had a strong, impelling reason for saying nothing of the prayer which must have accompanied this fasting. My maidens will fast: They, too, must have been of Jewish blood, or else they were attached to Esther by a strong bond of sympathy. If I perish, I perish: "Nehemiah, though a courageous man and a favorite of his royal master, was filled with apprehension at the prospect of a far less dangerous interview with a much more reasonable ruler than the half-mad Xerxes. These oriental authorities were shrouded in the terror of divinities. Their absolute power left the lives of all who approached them at the mercy of their caprice."

5:1. The third day: The third day from the commencement of her fasting. In the inner court of the king's house: This was the place forbidden except on pain of death. This did not place her in the immediate presence of the king. His throne was in the throne-room and a door from this opened directly into the court. His throne was over against or opposite this door. The door would be open and the king could see her in the court.

2. She obtained favor: The result depended entirely upon the caprice of the king. The historian does not attempt

standing in the court, that she obtained favor in his sight; and the king held out to Esther the golden sceptre that was in his hand. So Esther drew near, and touched the top of the sceptre. 3 Then

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to account for his favorable reception of her. The Jew would have found in this an evidence of God's providence and the modern believer will be inclined to take the same view of it. **Touch the top of the sceptre:** This was probably a part of the ceremony by which one who had penetrated into the forbidden privacy of the king should be forgiven. The holding out of the scepter was the king's part;

said the king unto her, What wilt thou, queen Esther? and what is thy request? it shall be given thee even to the half of the kingdom.

the touching it was her part and signified her humble submission and gratitude.

3. What wilt thou? No word was needed to convey to the king the intelligence that Esther had some favor to ask. His bearing is further proof of his favor. With his offer to give her half of the kingdom compare the same offer made by Antipas (Mark 6:33).

COMMENTS.

The Women of the Bible. Esther is unquestionably the heroine of this story and the book correctly bears her name. Women are given a prominence in the Old Testament which is not granted to them in other ancient literature. They occupy conspicuous places, from Eve to Mary, and some of the most heroic situations in the history of Israel show a woman holding the central position. Deborah, Jael and Judith are women who manifest physical daring and shame the men by their bravery. On the side of evil Jezebel, Delilah and Athaliah are conspicuous. Probably the two that stand out most conspicuously and are prominent because of the display of true womanly virtues are Ruth and Esther. They lived in quite different atmospheres, but they are true sisters in womanly grace and tact. The women of Israel enjoyed a freedom which was denied to their sisters in most other oriental nations. The remarkable fact about Esther is that, in spite of the enervating and relaxing atmosphere of the harem life, she maintained the noble virtues and good quali-

ties which her sisters exhibited in more normal surroundings.

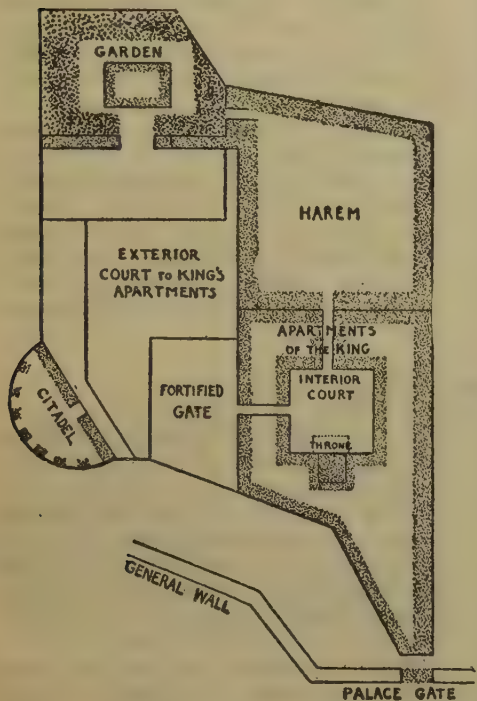
Esther and Her Surroundings. "Our Esther is a heroine—capable, energetic, brave and patriotic. The splendor of her career is seen in this very fact, that she does not succumb to the luxury of her surroundings. The royal harem among the lily-beds of Shushan is like a palace in the land of the lotus-eaters, 'where it is always afternoon,' and its inmates, in their dreamy indolence, are tempted to forget all obligations and interests beyond the obligation to please the king and their own interest in securing every comfort wealth can lavish on them. We do not look for a Boadicea in such a hothouse of narcotics. And when we find there a strong, unselfish woman such as Esther, conquering almost insuperable temptations to a life of ease, and choosing a course of terrible danger to herself for the sake of her oppressed people, we can echo the admiration of the Jews for their national heroine."

Her Patriotism. "But when Esther has assented to the demands of Mordecai, she

appears in her people's cause with the spirit of true patriotism. She scorns to forget her humble origin in all the splendor of her later advancement. She will own her despised and hated people before the king; she will plead the cause of the oppressed, though at the risk of

for the seclusion and obscurity of the old days when her safety lay in her insignificance! But she saw that her new privileges involved new responsibilities. A royal harem is the last place in which we should look for the recognition of this truth. Esther is to be honored because, even in that palace of idle luxury she could acknowledge the stern obligation that so many in her position would never have glanced at. It is always difficult to perceive and act on the responsibility that certainly accompanies favor and power . . . For while unusual prosperity brings unusual responsibility, simply because it affords unusual opportunities for doing good, it tends to cultivate pride and selfishness, and the miserable worldly spirit that is fatal to all high endeavor and all real sacrifice."

Her Use of Her Position. "Esther was wise in taking the suggestion of her cousin that she had been raised up for the very purpose of saving her people. Here was a faith, reserved and reticent, but real and powerful. It was no idle chance that had tossed her on the crest of the wave while so many of her sisters were weltering in the dark floods beneath. A clear, high purpose was leading her on to a strange and mighty destiny, and now the destiny was appearing, sublime and terrible, like some awful mountain-peak that must be climbed unless the soul that has come thus far will turn traitor and fall back into failure and ignominy. When Esther saw this she acted on it with the promptitude of the founder of her nation, who esteemed the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt, but with this difference, that, while Moses renounced his high rank in Pharaoh's court in order to identify himself with his people, the Queen of Ahasuerus retained her perilous position and turned it to good account in her saving mission. Thus there are two ways in which an exalted person may serve others. He may come down from



Plan of Xerxes' Palace.

her life. She is aware of the danger of her undertaking, but she says, 'If I perish, I perish.' The habit of obedience could not have been strong enough to carry her through the terrible ordeal if Mordecai's hard requirement had not been seconded by the voice of her own conscience. She knows that it is right that she should undertake this difficult and dangerous work. How naturally might she have shrunk back with regret

his high estate, like Moses, like Christ, who was rich and for our sakes became poor, or he may take advantage of his privileged position to use it for the good of his brethren, regarding it as a trust to be held for those whom he can benefit, like Joseph, who was able in this way to save his father and his brothers from famine, and like Esther in the present case. Circumstances will guide the willing to a decision as to which of these courses should be chosen."

A Woman of Noble Purpose. "Esther was a woman of resources. She did not trust to her courage alone to secure her end. It was not enough that she owned her people, and was willing to plead their cause. She had the definite purpose of saving them to effect. She was not content to be a martyr to patriotism; a sensible, practical woman, she did her utmost to be successful in effecting the deliver-

ance of the threatened Jews. With this end in view, it was necessary for her to proceed warily. Her first step was gained when she had secured an audience with the king. We may surmise that her beautiful countenance was lit up with a new, rare radiance when all self-seeking was banished from her mind and an intense, noble aim fired her soul; and thus, it may be, her very loftiness of purpose helped to secure its success. Beauty is a gift, a talent, to be used for good, like any other divine endowment; the highest beauty is the splendor of soul that sometimes irradiates the most commonplace countenance, so that, like Stephen's, it shines as the face of an angel. Instead of degrading her beauty with foolish vanity, Esther consecrated it to a noble service, and thereby it was glorified. This one talent was not lodged with her useless." (Skinner.)

THE LESSON STORY.

There may not be any mention of God in the book of Esther, nor any reference to priest nor temple. But there is a spirit of heroic devotion to the welfare of others that breathes the very spirit of Christianity. Five striking figures confront the reader of the book, namely, Ahasuerus, Vashti, Haman, Mordecai and Esther. Esther is the heroine. Her name means "star," and one says of her: "What in all nature is so full of lustrous, permanent, steady beauty as a star, beaming forth out of everlasting blue—sometimes upon broken masses of storm clouds—oftener through their wild rifts, and oftener still silvering the black masses of night, guiding the traveler in his solitary way or directing the billow-tossed mariner to his desired haven? We speak of the star of hope, the star of joy, the star of superiority. All this Esther was to her people."

It is not the pious tone, the frequent utterance of the name of Deity nor the

display of the mere accompaniments of religion, that make a man holy or a book sacred. It is the presence, the power of noble character or the authoritative utterance of high moral truth that wins confidence and admiration. When one sees unselfish love, patriotism, courage, heroism and the spirit of self-sacrifice he sees the fruit of true religion. After all we are not to be judged by our professions but by our fruits. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self-control; against such there is no law."

But the fruits of Esther's character were not all beautiful and spiritual. If she should be judged according to the Christian light of to-day she would be found wanting in many things. But we have no right thus to judge her. Why she should not have desired to return to Jerusalem rather than to abide in a strange land we know not. Why she

should have been willing to marry a heathen; willing to take the place of Vashti, the rejected queen; willing to become one of a multitude of wives to so corrupt a king, we may not divine. Why she wished to take the lives of Haman's ten sons and cause five hundred officers of the court to die we may not be able to answer. But giving her the benefit of every doubt, considering her times, orphanage, environment, we must admire her obedience, her devotion to her people, her heroism, her self-forgetfulness, her gratitude, her humility and her tact.

Her beauty was made instrumental for mercy and justice. While nothing is said of her faith in God, or of her prayer to him, we may infer that she was led by faith and strengthened in her high self-sacrifice through the prayers offered by herself and her people. Certainly those were noble and heroic words sent by her to Mordecai: "Go, gather together all the Jews that are present in Shushan, and fast ye for me, and neither eat nor drink three days, night nor day. I also and my maidens will fast in like manner; and so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish."

Certainly in that heathen palace, in that great kingdom of worldliness, vanity and selfish luxury, in the atmosphere of injustice and cruelty, in the presence of

vice and universal degradation, Esther shines like a star. The oriental harems were not favorable to strength of character or purpose. The power of the king to destroy according to his whim or caprice filled every resident of the palace with constant dread. Esther was afraid, but trusted in the King of kings, as Daniel and his companions had trusted. She was not ashamed in the crisis to identify herself with her people, despised and condemned as they were. Her love and courage changed the decree. She might have been a better witness to the true religion. But how she could have been more heroic for the sake of her people is beyond the power of the mind to conceive. We may not agree with one who says: "Esther is the most attractive character found in the annals of history;" and we may dissent from another who declares: "In the splendid galaxy of Hebrew women of the olden times, no name stands more prominent than that of Esther and none shines with a richer luster." But we shall never forget the woman who, so circumstanced that she alone could save her people from destruction, rose triumphantly to the task and, taking her own life in her hands, and against the law of the realm, approached the proud, capricious and cruel monarch in behalf of her own despised race and secure for them deliverance.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What psalm furnished the Scripture section for our last lesson?

2. Who is spoken of as "favorable" and as having restored the captives?

3. What connection is there between forgiveness of human sin and the cessation of the divine wrath? Psal. 85:2, 3.

4. Whose attitude must be changed in order to salvation, God's or ours? Psal. 85:4,

5. What is necessary to true and full rejoicing on our part? Psal. 85:6.

6. What readiness on our part is essential if we would know God's peace? Psal. 85:8.

7. What spirit on our part brings salvation near and glory also? Psal. 85:9.

8. How does the Golden Text confirm the lessons of Psalm 85? Psal. 126:3,

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. When Mordecai knew what Haman had accomplished, what four unusual things did he do? Esther 4:1.

2. What law is here mentioned as to entering the king's gate? Esther 4:2.

3. What, and how universal, was the effect of the king's decree upon the Jews? Esther 4:3.

4. To what motive in the king did Haman appeal for the destruction of the Jews? Esther 3:8, 9.

5. What was Haman's motive in seeking the death of the Jews? Esther 3:1-6.

6. Who told Esther of the decree and what did she do? Esther 4:4, 5.

7. Tell briefly the story as to how Esther became queen? Esther 2:16, 17.

8. What did Mordecai tell Hathach, whom Esther had sent to him? Esther 4:5-7.

9. What also did Mordecai give to Hathach and what charge did he send to Esther? Esther 4:8.

10. What message did queen Esther

send back to Mordecai? Esther 4:10, 11.

11. What reply did Mordecai send to Esther? Esther 4:13, 14.

12. What answer did Esther then send to Mordecai? Esther 4:15, 16.

13. What particular heroism did Esther show for her people? Esther 4:16.

14. What was the result of Esther's appearance before the king? Esther 5:1, 2.

15. What was the king's offer and what Esther's request? Esther 5:3, 4.

16. What besetting sin ruled in Haman's heart and how was he made miserable? Esther 5:9-13.

17. What did Zeresh, Haman's wife, and his friends suggest? Esther 5:14.

18. What matter concerning Mordecai came into the mind of the king? Esther 6:1-3.

19. What did Haman suggest for Mordecai, thinking it was for himself? Esther 6:6-9.

20. How was Haman destroyed and how were the Jews delivered? Esther 7:1-10.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. The romantic story of Esther pleading for her people has thrilled many generations. It reveals a beautiful devotion to her nation, although it had been broken and led into captivity. As she took her life into her own hands, to survive or perish, trusting in the God of her fathers for success and sure that her cause was just, so thousands of heroines have gone forth in the name of Christ to do the bravest deeds and to suffer for others. The story of Esther should be committed to heart.

2. God uses the vanities, weaknesses and even the sins of men for the furtherance of justice and humanity. The beauty of Esther was consecrated to a high purpose. The spell of that beauty upon a

wicked king, a king who had been immeasurably cruel to noble Vashti, was used for the promotion of righteousness and mercy.

3. Poor Haman was a personification of vain pride. If we trace the disaster of pride through the Old and New Testaments, where it is authoritatively condemned of Heaven and outlawed by the very nature of things, we shall shun it as we would shun a serpent. Jesus taught James and John not to ask for high honors in his kingdom, but rather to be willing to suffer for his name's sake. He taught Peter and the other apostles to stoop cheerfully to wash one another's feet; to humble themselves as a little child and be content to die that God might be glorified and his merciful will accomplished.

Lesson VII.

November 12.

BELSHAZZAR'S FEAST AND FATE.

Daniel 5. (Print 17-30.)

World's Temperance Sunday.

GOLDEN TEXT—God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil. Eccl. 12:14.

Memory Verses—25-28. **Suggested Reading**—Dan. 2-5. **Time**—539 B. C. **Persons**—Daniel and Belshazzar.

DAILY READINGS.

Nov. 6..... M—Dan. 5:1-31—Belshazzar's Feast and Fate.
 Nov. 7..... T—Esther 1:1-22—Ahasuerus' Great Feast and His Folly.
 Nov. 8..... W—1 Kings 16:8-14—Conspiring Against a Drunken King.
 Nov. 9..... T—1 Kings 20:1-21—Losing a Battle Through Drunkenness.
 Nov. 10.... F—Isa. 5:8-12—Feasting till Inflamed by Wine.
 Nov. 11.... S—1 Sam. 25:1-38—Nabal's Feasting and Drunkenness.
 Nov. 12.... S—1 Thess. 5:1-22—The Day of the Lord Cometh as a Thief in the Night.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

For our present lesson we turn back along the line of Jewish history for a few years. Daniel is once more the leading character. He was mentioned last in the lesson of Sept. 24th. The events of the present lesson are earlier than his deliverance from the lions' den by probably one or two years. The mighty Babylon, which to the Chaldeans seemed impregnable, is hastening to a change of rulers. It was more than a mere change of dynasties. A new race comes upon the stage. Chaldeans are succeeded by Persians. The empire prior to this change had two rulers, an able man named Nabonadius, but who lacked the royal blood, and his son Belshazzar, descended on his mother's side from the great Nebuchadnezzar. The latter remained within the city while the former commanded the army without. The author of Daniel is very brief and gives no circumstances. He says simply, "In that night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain" (v. 30). How the battle raged by which this result was brought about, he has no words to say. He was not interested in the details, but

told his narrative for the sake of the results and the lessons which they teach. There have been two explanations of how this death of the ruler and the overthrow of Babylon was achieved. The older one was based on the statement of Herodotus. One of the older commentaries describes it thus: "Canals were dug to draw off the greater portion of the Euphrates above the city, and permit the passage of soldiers along the river-bed. Everything was soon prepared; but Cyrus waited for some great festival when the attention of the Babylonian soldiers and citizens should be diverted from the works of his sappers. On the occasion of the 'feast' described in this chapter, everything happened as the conqueror expected. Belshazzar forgot his enemies or left the care of them to others. He gave himself to the excesses of the banquet at which his 'thousand lords' were gathered. The people imitated their betters; feasting and dancing, drunken riot and boastful security took possession of all. The very sentries forgot their duties and neglected to close the water-gates. 'In that night' the dikes were cut, the

canals carried off the water, and the Medes and Persians passed up to the river walls. Without a struggle Babylon fell into the hands of her enemies. In the massacre which followed, 'Belshazzar was slain.'" (Bib. Com.)

In this, however, Herodotus seems to have been mistaken. He had confused this capture of the city with one of the two sieges of Babylon conducted by Darius. It was he and not Cyrus who captured the city in this way. In the buried library of Babylon was discovered a small flat tablet, now preserved in the British Museum, which tells of this period in the history of Babylon. Here it is stated that Cyrus intrigued with a dis-

affected party within the city. Skinner asks: "Who would be so likely as the persecuted Jews to play this part?" The tablet goes on to relate that after a battle fought in the open country Cyrus was received into the city without having to strike another blow. The author of Daniel understood that at this point the rule of Babylon was assumed by Darius the Mede. Whether this was made necessary by the fact that Cyrus was compelled to hasten elsewhere, leaving this city to be ruled by his viceroy, is not known. Nabonadius, the senior king, after his defeat by Cyrus, fled to Borsippa, but here he was captured and was treated with indulgence.

BELSHAZZAR.

The ancient historians who are best informed on this period gave the name of the last Chaldean king of Babylon as Nabonadius. Daniel says Belshazzar. Historical critics wrestled with this conflict and either decided it unfavorable to Daniel, acknowledged the need of more information, or offered hypotheses that could not be demonstrated. In 1854 Sir Henry Rawlinson discovered and translated some clay tablets of Nabonadius. In one of these he prays his god to preserve him and grant him long life. The

language suggests some pressing danger. He continues, "And for Belshazzar, my eldest son, the offspring of my heart, open his heart to the worship of thy great divinity, and let him never admit evil there." This explained the mystery as to who Belshazzar was. He was the heir-apparent to the throne, and the author of Daniel implies that he was associated with his father in the government. There was a precedent for this in the co-operation of Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar in the burden of founding and governing Babylon.

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

This king made a great feast to a thousand of his lords. In the midst of the feasting, doubtless when the king had become heated with wine, he gave orders that the vessels which belonged to the temple at Jerusalem, and which had been captured by Nebuchadnezzar, should be brought to the banquet room and be used as common drinking cups. This was an act of sacrilege and it did not and could not pass unheeded by the divine retribution. At that very time the eye of the king caught sight of a portent which checked the mirth in his heart and upon

his lips. The fingers of a man's hand were writing on the wall in the full glare of the lights of the banquet room. He could not grasp the meaning of the words which were written. He called for the official interpreters, but they, too, were at a complete loss. His mother came to his aid by telling him of Daniel and of the power which he had manifested in interpreting the dreams of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel was summoned at once and offered great honor and wealth to interpret the strange words upon the plaster of the wall. At this point Daniel began to speak.

17 Then Daniel answered and said before the king, Let thy gifts be to thyself, and give thy reawrds to another; nevertheless I will read the writing unto the king, and make known to him the interpretation. 18 O thou king, the Most High God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father the kingdom, and greatness, and glory, and majesty: 19 and because of the greatness that he gave him, all the peoples, nations, and languages trembled and feared be-

fore him: whom he would he slew, and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he raised up, and whom he would he put down. 20 But when his heart was lifted up, and his spirit was hardened so that he dealt proudly, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: 21 and he was driven from the sons of men, and his heart was made like the beasts', and his dwelling was with the wild asses; he was fed with grass like oxen, and his

EXPLANATORY.

17. **Daniel answered:** The speech of the king in which the latter had promised him wealth and honor on the condition of his interpreting the writing on the wall. **Let thy gifts be to thyself:** This should be interpreted as a polite refusal of the offered reward. He does not esteem it of any significance and his course will not be influenced by either the giving or the withholding of it. From Nebuchadnezzar he did not hesitate to accept rewards (2:48), but he declines the gift of Belshazzar. The sacrilege which has been committed at the feast must account for the difference in his attitude. **I will read the writing unto the king:** Daniel speaks with the utmost confidence, but this is not the result of egotism on his part, but of actual knowledge given him from the Lord.

18. **The Most High God:** A description of God which is found frequently in the book of Daniel, and which is not used by the prophet alone, but by Nebuchadnezzar as well (3:26). On this occasion it was especially appropriate, for in the banquet hall were the images of many gods. In contrast to these Jehovah was the Most High God. **Gave Nebuchadnezzar the kingdom:** Daniel does not hesitate to confess his faith in Jehovah even in the presence of this company that have been making sport of the sa-

cred objects belonging to the temple of his god.

19. This verse is a vivid description of the greatness of Nebuchadnezzar. It represents all mankind in the attitude of fear at his absolute power. He had the control of life and death; his word could elevate or degrade men. The object of this and the previous verse is to impress upon Belshazzar that his power and influence have fallen far below that of his ancestor.

20. **When his heart was lifted up:** Pride was the natural result of such unlimited power. "Pride goeth before a fall," and so his arrogance was but the forerunner of his degradation.

21. This verse is a brief statement of the incident of Nebuchadnezzar's history which is described more fully in chapter 4. The king was afflicted with a form of madness in which he made his dwelling with the beasts and ate grass like an ox. This lasted for a period of seven times. At the end he was restored to his power. Daniel's present description of this incident is the same as that of the fuller account except that he graphically says that he made his dwelling with the wild asses. Until he knew: This was the moral and religious value of the incident, and Dan-

body was wet with the dew of heaven; until he knew that the Most High God ruleth in the kingdom of men, and that he setteth up over it whomsoever he will. 22 And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thy heart, though thou knewest all this; 23 but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of Heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou and thy lords, thy wives and thy concubines, have drunk wine from them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know; and the God in whose

hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified. 24 Then was the part of the hand sent from before him, and this writing was inscribed.

25 And this is the writing that was inscribed: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. 26 This is the interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and brought it to an end. 27 TEKEL; thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. 28 PERES; thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and Persians.

iel tells of it for the purpose of impressing the same truth upon Belshazzar. He was living in utter disregard of the God who ruleth in the kingdoms of men.

22. **Thou his son:** Belshazzar was the son of his daughter. **Hast not humbled thy heart:** Here Daniel applies the lesson derived from Nebuchadnezzar's history to Belshazzar. He shows the contrast between the two kings in that the former repented and the latter did not. He probably had the further object of inciting Belshazzar to a similar repentance. **Thou knowest all this:** In this was his great fault. It was defiant opposition to the known will and design of the Most High God.

23. Here the contrast between Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar is fully brought out. Daniel never appears nobler than at this moment when he sternly and with righteous indignation denounces the king for his pride and sacrilege.

24. **Then:** Therefore, because thou didst in the way described exalt thyself above Jehovah. **The hand sent from before him:** The hand was the hand of the angels which minister before him. Cf. 7:10.

25. This verse tells what the writing was. It consisted of four Aramaic words, all of which are participles. The first

is repeated, evidently for the sake of emphasis, like the "verily, verily," of Jesus. Since Aramaic was the commercial language of Babylon it has always been a subject of speculation why the wise men could not read it. Various conjectures have been offered. One is that a form of the alphabet was used with which they were not familiar. The Rabbis said it was because the words were written "pillar wise," that is from top to bottom, rather than from right to left, the usual way of writing Aramaic words. All of these are pure guesses. The probable explanation is that they were able to read the words, but could attach no meaning to them which would throw light upon the future of Belshazzar. Daniel was able to do this only because he had received a divine revelation (vs. 17-28).

26. **This is the interpretation:** This is an example of the early mode of exegesis. The interpreter would speak a word and then announce its meaning. He would then proceed to the next word. *Mene* signifies numbered. Daniel expands this so as to give its full meaning.

27. **Tekel:** This means *weighed*. Daniel applies its meaning to Belshazzar.

28. **Peres:** In verse 27 the form of the word is *upharsin*. The *U* is the conjunction and means *and*. It is no part

29 Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with purple, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom.

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of the word. Pharsin is only another form of *Peres*, without difference in meaning. On account of the resemblance in sound there is probably an allusion in this word to the Persians, by whom Belshazzar's kingdom was to fall.

29. They clothed Daniel, etc.: It had been promised and the promise is kept. The king could ill afford to break faith, and it may be as Ephraim, the Syrian, suggests, that he wished to propitiate one so powerful. Why Daniel accepted when

30 In that night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain. 31 And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.

he had declined (v. 17) is not stated. It was an empty honor since the kingdom was so soon to fall. A recognition of Daniel's God is implied in the honors bestowed upon him. Third ruler in the kingdom: Why *third* and not *second*? To this question no satisfactory answer could be given till the inscription of Nabonadius, mentioned in the introduction, was discovered. This makes it probable that he had associated Belshazzar with him as joint king. Hence Daniel had to be third.

COMMENTS.

Belshazzar's Pride. (v. 20.) Daniel traces very clearly one of the evil consequences of absolute power. It produces pride in the heart. It is almost inconceivable that this should not be the result. The daily experience of feeling dependence on no one, but of having every one dependent on himself, while a stream of constant flattery is poured into his ear, will tempt even the most balanced of men to feel himself a god. History affords a number of pictures of men of undoubted genius and power who have become intoxicated by their own achievements and have given way to folly. Daniel candidly states that this was the history of Nebuchadnezzar, but to him was granted an experience which taught him that there was a power greater than his. Knowledge of the one true God is the only correction of pride.

The Reason for Belshazzar's Doom. Daniel uses as an illustration to prepare Belshazzar for the announcement of his doom the experience of Nebuchadnezzar.

It, as we have just seen, teaches that pride leads to destruction. This is likewise the instruction of the present passage. Its design and the use which was made of it in early times was that scorners, blasphemers, those who despised God will most certainly be punished. This was a prevalent sin during and immediately following the days of Daniel, and this narrative teaches the Jews that for all such persons "vengeance as a lion lieth in wait."

The Most High God. Another lesson which this narrative was designed to teach was the truth which was ever uppermost in the thoughts of pious Jews at this time. There is only one true God. Other gods were "gods of silver and gold, of brass, iron, wood and stone, which see not, nor hear nor know." This was the period in Jewish history when the nation was being punished for idolatry and when they were to learn the lesson that there is no other god before Jehovah. The narratives and incidents

teaching this lesson are many, but all were needed. Jehovah was presented to Belshazzar as "the God in whose hand thy breath is," and to every Jew he was the God most High.

Drunkenness and Sacrilege. The passage was not primarily written to teach the sin of drunkenness, but it plainly sets forth the attendant evils of debauchery. It is the companion and parent of other sins. There was wine and merry-making at this feast which Belshazzar gave to his thousand lords. His wives and concubines were present. Such banquets usually ended in a revelry in which intoxication was regarded as no disgrace. There would be dancers present also, and music to which the dancers would dance

in all the abandon of an Eastern orgy. But worse than this is the shocking sacrilege of which the king was guilty. Babylonian history within recent years had received many impressive lessons of the might of Jehovah, but in the excitement of this drunken feast all are forgotten and the king hurls scorn and contempt at the mighty God who had given to Nebuchadnezzar the kingdom and greatness and glory and majesty.

"Evil things in robes of sorrow
Assailed the monarch's high estate.
Ah, woe is me! for never morrow
Shall dawn upon him desolate!
And all about his throne the glory
That blushed and bloomed
Is but an ill-remembered story
Of the old time entombed."

THE LESSON STORY.

The picture of the feast of Belshazzar must be viewed in connection with the picture of Nebuchadnezzar eating grass and learning that God reigns among the nations. The reign of the latter should have been the salvation of the former. The chastisement of Nebuchadnezzar should have been a warning gospel to Belshazzar. Belshazzar was blamed and condemned because he had not humbled himself, although he knew God's severe but merciful judgments upon his father, whose reign preceded his own.

What were those judgments? What was the light given unto Nebuchadnezzar? His forgotten dream of the great image of exceeding brightness, with its head of gold, its breast of silver, its thighs of brass, its legs of iron and its feet part of iron and part of clay, broken by a stone cut out of the mountain without hands, was successfully recalled and truly interpreted by Daniel. As the result Nebuchadnezzar had believed in the God of Daniel. The king had acknowledged Jehovah as the God of gods and King of kings. Moreover, Nebuchadnezzar had witnessed the godly lives, the

faith, heroism and glorious triumph of Daniel's three companions whom he had ordered to be cast into the fiery furnace. After their deliverance and after his own vision of the four persons—instead of only the three—walking in safety through the fire, he made a great proclamation of his faith in the living and true God.

Again, Nebuchadnezzar had dreamed of a great tree, high as the heavens, wide as the world, with fair leaves and fruit enough upon its branches for all. Its shade was wide enough to shelter all beasts, its branches numerous enough to provide a dwelling place for all birds, and yet, in the dream, the king saw a holy one from heaven and heard him cry aloud, "Hew down the tree, and cut off its branches, shake off its leaves and scatter its fruit; let the beasts get away from under it, and the fowls from its branches. Nevertheless, leave the stump of its roots in the earth, even with a band of iron and brass, in the tender grass of the field; and let it be wet with the dew of heaven, and let his portion be with the beasts in the grass of the earth; let his heart be changed from man's, and let

a beast's heart be given unto him; and let seven times pass over him . . . to the intent that the living may know that the Most High ruleth in the kingdoms of men."

Daniel had been called to the king to interpret this strange and distressing dream and had told the king that he was the great tree and should be driven from men and should eat grass like an ox and be wet with the dews of heaven till he should know that the Most High, whom the king's pride had shut out of his heart, "ruleth in the kingdom of men, and giveth it to whomsoever He will." Daniel told the king that the stump of the tree, bound with iron and brass, meant that his kingdom should be restored to him after his awful lesson. The king, swollen with pride, said: "Is not this great Babylon, which I have built for the royal dwelling place by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?" Immediately there fell a voice from heaven, saying, "The kingdom is departed from thee and thy dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field." At the end of the humbling and sorrowful discipline his lost reason was restored and also his kingdom. Then he praised and honored God, knowing that all "those that walk in pride he is able to abase."

Belshazzar, in his bacchanalian feast, had forgotten God, forgotten Daniel and

cast away from his memory the warning written in the reign of his predecessor; had profaned the sacred vessels of the living God and had reached the very climax of worldly and selfish pride when the hand of God reached out to write his doom upon the wall. Trembling with terror, he turned to Daniel for a ray of hope. But his awakening was too late. God had come to his judgment. The Divine scales were true to the Divine purpose and Belshazzar was weighed in the balance over against his opportunities and was found wanting! "*Mene, mene, tekel, upharsin*" were the words of doom. But these were the words that told the reason for such a fate: "Thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thy heart, though thou knewest all this, but hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven."

Then commanded Belshazzar and they clothed Daniel with purple and put a chain of gold about his neck, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom and "in that night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain."

The wine of the feast and the blood of the king cry unto us to humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God, and the faithful words of the prophet teach us that, according to our opportunities and our deeds, we, too, shall be judged.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What is the connection between the Golden Text and the lesson of last week?
2. Name the four most prominent persons in our last lesson? Include Haman.
3. What were the characteristics of Haman, as presented in the book of Esther?
4. What appeal did Mordecai make to Esther for her people?

5. How did Esther respond to Mordecai's request and with what success?
6. What was the cause of the decree of the king against the Jews?
7. What telling argument did Mordecai make to Esther? Esther 4:13, 14.
8. Name some of the signs of a Divine providence in last week's lesson.

QUESTIONS UPON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. Who was Belshazzar and what kind of feast did he make? Dan. 5:1.
2. What may we infer from the refer-

- ence to wine drinking in this lesson? Dan. 5:1-4.
3. What command did the king make

while drinking before his lords? Dan. 5:2.

4. What do you regard as the particular evil in using the vessels taken out of the temple in Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar? Dan. 5:22, 23.

5. In drinking from the sacred vessels of the temple what did they praise? Dan. 5:4.

6. How many people do you suppose were present at the feast? Dan. 5:1, 2.

7. What appeared and at what place to frighten the king? Dan. 5:5.

8. What four declarations are written showing the king's terror? Dan. 5:6.

9. What then did the king cry aloud in his horror? Dan. 5:7.

10. What request did he make of the "wise men" and what reward did he offer? Dan. 5:7.

11. What failure on the part of the

"wise men" added to the distress? Dan. 5:8, 9.

12. Who came into the banquet house and spoke of Daniel and what was the message concerning him? Dan. 5:10-13.

13. What was the substance of the king's address to Daniel? Dan. 5:13-16.

14. Name the points in order of Daniel's reply to the king. Dan. 5:17-24.

15. What of Daniel's humility; of his faith; his knowledge; his courage; reverence?

16. What especially did Daniel condemn in the king? Dan. 5:22.

17. What was the meaning of the writing against Belshazzar? Dan. 5:25-28.

18. According to what principle was the king weighed and found wanting?

19. What seems to have been the last command given by Belshazzar? Dan. 5:29.

20. In that very night what remarkable judgment occurred and how? Dan. 5:30.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. The first and most important lesson in the life of Belshazzar is that God judges men according to the light granted unto them. He weighs them according to their ability to know and do righteous deeds and to abstain from evil. Daniel in his brief sermon to the frightened king dwells upon what God had done for Nebuchadnezzar, Belshazzar's father. God had given him greatness; the nations had trembled before him; he had been lifted up and hardened by pride. Here again is that dangerous sin which has been mentioned often in these lessons. Because of pride and great self-sufficiency he had lost his throne, his reason, reputation and the comforts and pleasures of life. He, too, had been favored with a remarkable knowledge of God through Daniel and the other three Hebrew children, but pride had swallowed him up and had made him rebellious against, and forgetful of, God. "Thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thy heart, though thou knewest all this."

2. In the New Testament we learn that the man having the one talent is held responsible for the one talent only. The eleventh hour laborer—who worked cheerfully and hard for one full hour without any bargaining spirit toward his employer—was held responsible only according to his opportunity when he said, as his reason for not working, that no man had hired him. Paul declared that "If there be first a *willing mind* it is acceptable according to that a man hath (according to his ability) not according to that he hath not." This principle is illustrated again and again in the New Testament especially. The real condemnation, said Jesus, is not because of unavoidable error, but "that light is come into the world, and men love the darkness rather than the light." Let us be careful, therefore, in judging men, to take into consideration (1) whether they have or have not the light, and (2) whether they love it or hate it. Jesus says also: "If any man willeth to do his will, he shall know"

Lesson VIII.

November 19.

EZRA'S JOURNEY TO JERUSALEM.

Ezra 8:15-36. (Print 21-32.)

GOLDEN TEXT—The hand of our God is upon all them that seek him for good.

Ezra 8:22.

Memory Verses—21-23. **Suggested Reading**—Ezra 7:10. **Time**—About 458 B. C. **Places**—The river Ahava and road from Babylon to Jerusalem. **Persons**—Ezra, twelve priests and the rest of his company.

DAILY READINGS.

Nov. 13.... M—Ezra 8:15-36—Ezra's Journey to Jerusalem.

Nov. 14.... T—Ezra 7:1-10—Ezra's Purpose in this Journey.

Nov. 15.... W—Ezra 7:11-28—Ezra's Royal Firman (Permit).

Nov. 16.... T—Ezra 8:1-14—Ezra's List of Heads of Houses.

Nov. 17.... F—Ezra 9:1-15—Ezra's Prayer for Israel.

Nov. 18.... S—Ezra 10:1-17—Separating Israel from the People of the Land.

Nov. 19.... S—2 Cor. 5:20—6:18—"Be not Unequally Yoked with Unbelievers."

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

There was both a town and a river bearing the name Ahava. The location of neither is known. The river, like the Chebar, was probably one of the canals connecting with the Euphrates. Ezra's probable line of march would be up the valley of the Euphrates to some point near Thrapsacus and then it would turn southward. This was the route taken by

the Assyrian and Egyptian armies. A somewhat shorter route was to turn westward at a point farther south on the river and cross the desert by passing through the oasis on which stood Tadmor (later Palmyra). This was more dangerous and difficult and would probably be avoided by a small and defenceless company like that of Ezra.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

A period of eighty years intervenes between the events of the lesson for October 22 and Ezra's leadership of a caravan from Babylon to Jerusalem. The temple foundation was laid and the work of building commenced, but it was interrupted by the intrigues of their enemies as described in Ezra 4:5. The temple stood in this incomplete shape till the second year of Darius (4:24). This was the year 521 B. C. The Jews had

grown somewhat careless and the resumption of building was undertaken only at the urgent exhortations of the two prophets, Haggai and Zechariah. The provincial governor made inquiry as to their authority for building and they cited the original decree of Cyrus. The governor appealed to the king for instruction and the king confirmed the statement of the Jews. The work, therefore, was permitted to go on. After four years the temple

was completed and dedicated (6:15). This was in the year 516 B. C., twenty-two years after Cyrus had issued his decree. The seventh chapter of Ezra begins with the words "Now after these things." They cover an interval of fifty-eight years. (516-458 B. C.) Of this period we have knowledge of but two events in the history of the Jews. One is the interference with the building of the walls of Jerusalem as narrated in Ezra 4:7-23 and the other is the story of Esther which belongs to the reign of Xerxes. But the latter had no part in the development of the Jewish nation or of its religious life. The historian seems to have found no incidents which he deemed of sufficient importance to relate. During this time Zerubbabel died without leaving any trace of his later years.

The people seem to have had great expectations of him, for some thought that he was to be the Messiah. A greater than he, however, was to do this work. Zerubbabel's task was to build the temple, and this he did. The second half of the book of Ezra introduces the hero whose name constitutes its title. He was a scribe, the prototype of the scribes whose golden age was about the time of Christ. The author introduces him with a brief sketch of his origin and an outline of his expedition to Jerusalem.

He then copies the edict which gave Ezra his authority and, in the words of Ezra himself, told in the first person, he gives a detailed account of his leading the caravan from the river Ahava to the holy city. This narration is the text of our present lesson.

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

Ezra made preparations for the journey to Jerusalem on the first day of the New year (7:9). He and his company assembled at Ahava on the 9th day of the same month. A poll was taken of the company present and the males were found to number 1,496. There were no Levites in the company, though there were a number of priests. The absence of Levites is noteworthy from the fact that in the company of Zerubbabel there were only seventy-four Levites (2:40), though the priests numbered 4,289 (2:36-39).

No certain reason can be given why the Levites were so backward about returning to Jerusalem. In all probability they were more attached to idolatry than the priests or laity. Ezra took advantage of the delay while they encamped at Ahava to secure some additions to his company from among the Levites, for he was going to Jerusalem to teach the Law and have

the temple services conducted in accord with its requirements. He therefore felt the need of some Levites. He summoned into his presence eleven men, nine of whom were rulers and two were teachers. These he sent to a place named Casiphia, probably a neighboring village, in which there seems to have been a community of Levites and Nethinim with a chief by the name of Iddo at its head. From him he asked for Levitical volunteers. His messengers met with success, for on their return they were accompanied by thirty-eight Levites and two hundred and twenty Nethinim, a lower order of priestly assistants than the Levites. It traced its origin back to the time of David. The Nethinim were probably descendants of the Gibeonites. With this addition of two hundred and fifty-eight to his company Ezra prepared for the journey.

21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river Ahava, that we might humble ourselves before our God, to seek of him a straight way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance. 22 For I was ashamed to ask of the king a band of soldiers and horsemen to help us against the enemy in the way, because we had spoken unto the king, saying, The hand of our God is upon all them that seek him, for good; but his power and

his wrath is against all them that forsake him. 23 So we fasted and besought our God for this: and he was entreated of us.

24 Then I set apart twelve of the chiefs of the priests, even Sherebiah, Hashabiah, and ten of their brethren with them. 25 and weighed unto them the silver, and the gold, and the vessels, even the offering for the house of our God, which the king, and his counsellors, and his

EXPLANATORY.

21. **I proclaimed a fast:** Fasting was sometimes observed as a sign of deep grief, sometimes as an acknowledgment of gross sin, and at other times, as here, to intensify the religious fervor in prayer by restraining the appetite. **That we might humble ourselves:** The authorized version unfortunately rendered this "That we might afflict ourselves." But it was a moral and not a physical discipline which was sought. The pagans fasted because they believed that their voluntary physical suffering would propitiate their gods. There is no indication that Ezra held any such belief. **A straight way:** Straight in the sense that there would be no necessity of turning aside on account of attacks by robbers or enemies. **Our little ones:** The list mentions males only. Mention of little children shows that they were accompanied by their families. Hence the company must have numbered more than four thousand souls.

22. **A band of soldiers and horsemen:** Thirteen years after this Nehemiah led a company to Jerusalem and he was escorted by such a band of soldiers (Neh. 2:9). He went as an officer of the king and had no reason to feel the same hesitancy about an escort which Ezra does. **The enemy in the way:** In v. 31 they are described as the "lur-in-wait" by the way. They were robber bands and Bedouins of the desert, who might harass the line of march of even so large a car-

van as Ezra's. This road has dangers of the same sort to the present day. **The hand of our God:** This denotes "the merciful favor of God." In v. 18 it is called the good hand of our God. **All them that forsake him:** This is a common expression for religious faithlessness. Ezra feels that to rely on an armed escort, rather than upon God, would seem to the king, if it was not in fact, a forsaking of the Lord.

23. **Prayer accompanies the fasting.** The safety from danger which they enjoyed on the way was the proof that God was "entreated of us."

24. **Twelve of the chief of the priests, etc.:** As the text stands, it would seem that there were twelve priests only appointed. But the two named, Sherebiah and Hashabiah, were not priests but Levites (vs. 18, 19). In v. 30 it is said that both priests and Levites received the treasure. Hence the marginal reading, "twelve of the chief of the priests *besides* Sherebiah, Hashabiah and ten of their brethren" is unquestionably correct. There were twelve priests and twelve Levites chosen.

25. **The silver, etc.:** The gifts which had been presented to them by the king and others are mentioned in 7:15-27. **The offering for the house of our God:** The temple had been built and dedicated. These gifts were to furnish it and provide it with treasures.

princes, and all Israel there present, had offered: 26 I weighed into their hand six hundred and fifty talents of silver, and silver vessels a hundred talents; of gold a hundred talents; 27 and twenty bowls of gold, of a thousand darics; and two vessels of fine bright brass, precious as gold. 28 And I said unto them, Ye are holy unto Jehovah, and the vessels are holy; and the silver and the gold are a freewill-offering unto Jehovah, the God of your fathers. 29 Watch ye, and keep them, until ye weigh them before the chiefs of the priests and the Levites, and the princes of the fathers' houses of Is-

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rael, at Jerusalem, in the chambers of the house of Jehovah. 30 So the priests and the Levites received the weight of the silver and gold, and the vessels, to bring them to Jerusalem unto the house of our God.

31 Then we departed from the river Ahava on the twelfth day of the first month, to go unto Jerusalem: and the hand of our God was upon us, and he delivered us from the hand of the enemy and the lie-in-wait by the way. 32 And we came to Jerusalem, and abode there three days.

26. The value of the gifts mentioned here is enormous. A silver talent was worth about \$18.75, and a gold talent \$33.75. The entire treasure would aggregate about \$4,700,000.

27. A daric was worth about \$5. Hence the value of the twenty bowls was about \$5,000. The "two vessels of fine bright brass" are supposed to have been of an amalgam which was nearly or quite the same as modern brass. It was rare in ancient times and very valuable.

28. *Ye are holy*: The priests and Levites were consecrated unto the Lord and the vessels and treasure were likewise. Holiness does not mean sinlessness.

29. Their commission is not to end till they have weighed out the treasure "in the chambers of the house of Jehovah." They were the rooms that were attached, but external, to the temple building. See 1 Kings 6:5.

30. *Received the weight, etc.*: This was quite a business-like procedure, which reflects credit on Ezra for his prudence, his caution and his honesty.

31. *The twelfth day*: The camp of Ahava had lasted three days (v. 15). Hence the day of their arrival or assembly there was the 9th. On "the first day of the first month *began* he to go up from Babylon" (7:9). This means either that they had marched nine days from Babylon, in which case Ahava would be some distance up the river, or that these nine days were spent preparing for the journey, and that the encampment at Ahava was a preliminary muster, in which case it was probably near Babylon. *He delivered us, etc.*: We do not know whether this means that no attack was made, or that they were able successfully to repulse those made.

32. *We came to Jerusalem*: Accord- to 7:8 the journey occupied four months. The distance by the longer route was not far from 900 miles. The time was from April to August, hence much of the time they would probably move only in the early morning and late evening. The traveling would be slow and many stops would be made. *Three days*: These were for rest. Nehemiah rested the same length of time (2:11).

COMMENTS.

Preparation for the Journey. "After completing his company by the addition of the Levites, Ezra made a solemn religious preparation for his journey. Like the Israelites after the defeat at Gibeah in their retributive war with Benjamin; like the penitent people at Mizpeh, in the days of Samuel, when they put away their idols; like Jehoshaphat and his subjects when rumors of a threatened invasion filled them with apprehension—Ezra and his followers fasted and humbled themselves before God in view of their hazardous undertaking. The fasting was a natural sign of the humiliation, and this prostration before God was at once a confession of sin and an admission of absolute dependence on his mercy. Thus the people reveal themselves as the 'poor in spirit,' to whom our Lord directs his first beatitude. They are those who humble themselves, and therefore those whom God will exalt."

Fear to Dishonor God: "Ezra's first thought was to ask for an escort; but he tells us that he was ashamed to do so, as this would imply distrust in God. Whatever we may think of his logic, we must be struck by his splendid faith, and the loyalty which would run a great risk rather than suffer what might seem like dishonor to his God. Here was one of God's heroes. We can not but connect the preliminary fast with this courageous attitude of Ezra. So in tales of chivalry we read how knights were braced by prayer and fast and vigil to enter the most terrible conflicts with talismans of victory. In an age of rushing activity it is hard to find the hidden springs of strength in their calm retreats. The glare of publicity starts us on the wrong track, by tempting us to advertise our own excellencies, instead of abasing ourselves in the dust before God. Yet is it not now as true as ever that no boasted might of man can be in any way comparable to the

divine strength which takes possession of those who completely surrender their wills to God? Happy are they who have the grace to walk in the valley of humiliation, for this leads to the armory of supernatural power!" (Adeney.)

Ezra's Purpose. The scribe Ezra had two religious purposes in going to Jerusalem. The first was the beautifying of the temple, and for this he thanks God (7:27). The second was to teach the law of God (7:25). It is clearly stated that the people in Palestine know the Law, but it is Ezra's task to give them a more perfect knowledge of it. Not only is he to make it known, but he is to see that it is obeyed, Obedience to the Law was the very essence of Judaism as it is of Christianity likewise. The Christian, however, enjoys what James calls a "law of liberty." He is not bound by the shackles of a minute law, every detail of which must be carefully observed. Such a law Ezra taught, and ever after his name has been connected with this conception of law. He was a scribe, and the scribes who came after him developed this legal system so that its precepts became a yoke which the Jews were not able to bear.

Management of the Treasure. The reader can not fail to note the care with which Ezra provides for safeguarding the treasure. His first object was no doubt to have some who could be definitely held responsible for this great sum. Whether he so designed it or not he frees himself from responsibility. He is bearing treasure from the king, and on every side there were enemies who were seeking to injure the Jews. His course is wise in that it forestalls the possibility of a charge that he has misappropriated the funds. His own countrymen were to feel the force of his devotion to the Law and many of them would become enraged at him and seek his injury. He has prevented them from taking hold of any rumor of his dishonesty. Modern business with its

checks and safeguards upon those who handle the money of others can scarcely suggest an improvement upon Ezra's method of handling this trust money.

Ezra's Tact. In his handling of the delicate question of the relation of the priests and Levites Ezra shows tact. For some reason the Levites were disaffected and were not inclined to return. This is a certainty. Ezekiel declared that the Levites were to be degraded on account of their sinful conduct (44:9-16). Hence they seem to have been set off as a separate order and their inferiority to the priests was emphasized. This caused them to sulk and refuse to join the expedition. In his dealings with them Ezra took the wise course. In his instructions to his messengers as to what they should say to Iddo he no doubt dealt with this matter. At any rate when it came to assignment of the responsibility for the treasure he appointed an equal number of Levites and priests.

Trust in God and Self-protection. "Men like Ezra who know that they are instruments in the hand of the Lord, and indeed for the accomplishment of a high mission, may reckon with the confidence of heroes on especial divine protection and support in the midst of all the dangers threatening them: 'and although all the devil would withstand us,' etc. What, however, is secured to them in this respect by God cannot be for them a motive for giving themselves over to a false security, but only become an impulse for them to make use of all that is entrusted to them, with all the more conscientiousness for the accomplishment of its purposes. At the same time they would be very careful, like Ezra, when he ordered the weight of the gifts brought by him to be written down, of securing their good name against any wicked slanders that so easily are raised against them.'" (Schultz.)

THE LESSON STORY.

There were three returns from captivity in Babylon distinctly noted and should be kept distinct and clear in the memory. The first was under Sheshbazzar or Zerubbabel, B. C. 535; the second under Ezra—considered in the present lesson—B. C. 458; and the third was under the leadership of Nehemiah, B. C. 445. Those who were left in Assyria (Esther 8, 9, 11), and kept up their national distinction were known as The Dispersion. It was a long period from the first return to the second—seventy-eight years—longer than the period of the captivity itself. This second return was 58 years after the completion of the second temple. The state of affairs in Jerusalem had not been ideal for the half century preceding the return of Ezra. There was a long break between the sixth and seventh chapters of Ezra. Concerning the history of Judah and Jerusalem for that time but little is recorded. Although the temple had been built, the

walls had not been restored, nor had the rubbish been cleared away. It has been suggested that these Jews had been expecting a large influx of brethren from Babylon and other lands and had been disappointed. As yet there was no sign of the Gentile wealth pouring into their treasuries as had been promised by the prophet Haggai. They were impoverished and discouraged. The condition of the community in Judah was worse than it had been in Babylon and, no doubt, many wished they could be back again in Assyria.

The temple worship must have been but half-hearted. At first the policy of the community had been exclusive. It would not welcome even the Samaritans to aid it lest the purity of its race and religion should be defiled. But this policy seemed at length to be suicidal, both socially and commercially, and a new and more tolerant course was adopted. Lead-

ing families began to intermarry with the heathen and others followed till the land became defiled. The religious life of the homes was destroyed. Morals became lax; the Sabbaths were desecrated; ideals were degraded and the people became lukewarm in their temple worship.

This new influx of piety, faith, hope, zeal, loyalty, courage, patriotism and wealth from Assyria at this time was a wonderful inspiration.

With the coming of this comparatively small company under Ezra the religious spirit of the community became dominant. The captivity, under the providence of God, had been turned to good account. The captives had learned many lessons of great value. Especially had they learned the worth of religion.

They have been compared to an oak in the field beaten by the winds and bending before the storms but strengthened by opposition. Beautifully suggestive of their discipline is the prayer once offered by an earnest disciple of Christ: "Give me, O God, power to make all my sorrow music for the world." There is no teacher superior to experience. It is a hard but often a necessary master. Yet, while some are helped, others are broken by adversity. Hence the admonition is needed: "Despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him; for whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."

Ezra was a scribe, the most prominent if not the first of a new profession, and a very diligent student of the Law. He

edited, translated and interpreted the sacred books. Both the office of scribe and the worship and the order of the synagogue seem to have originated in and during the captivity. This special and new devotion to the study of the Law and the Prophets was of immense benefit to the Jewish people. The scribes copied, commented, recast and applied the word of God to the people. In Babylon they had not the temple but they had the book! "The men exalted the book and the book exalted the men." The sabbath came to be observed more strictly as a day of rest and prayer.

Ezra's enterprise has been called a great "home missionary expedition."

Just what the faithful teachers in the Sunday-schools are doing for those under their shepherding and teaching Ezra determined to do for Jerusalem; to "teach in Israel statutes and judgments." The difference, however, is that the Sunday-school teachers can present a Person instead of a Law; a sympathetic Life instead of cold statutes; the Gospel—the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth—and its glowing promise of the Holy Spirit to dwell in and strengthen, guide, comfort and sanctify every believer.

To get a full conception of Ezra's spirit, efforts at reformation, the difficulties in the way and the result, it will pay the reader to consider carefully the following chapters of the book of Ezra.

For a further consideration of this subject see "Preliminary Questions" of our next lesson.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. From whom was Ezra descended, and what was his profession? Ezra 7:1-6.
2. What was his purpose in making the journey to Jerusalem? Ezra 7:10.

3. What directions were given him by King Artaxerxes in respect to the treasures committed to his charge? 7:14-16; 7:17; 7:18; 7:19.

4. How did the king further manifest his personal interest? Ezra 7:20.

5. What requisitions was Ezra authorized to make on the treasures of the provinces west of the river Euphrates? Ezra 7:21-23.

6. What authority did the king confer upon Ezra himself? Ezra 7:25-26.

7. How was Ezra impressed with the king's kindness and to whom did he ascribe the honor of it all? Ezro. 7:27,28.

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. Before the caravan left Ahava, how did Ezra show his confidence in God? Ezra 8:21-23.

2. During the three days' encampment what did Ezra discover? Ezra 8:15.

3. Whom did Ezra particularly desire to have in the company? Ezra 8:16, 17.

4. What did Ezra earnestly ask of Jehovah for the pilgrims? Ezra 8:21.

5. Why was he ashamed to ask soldiers of the king? Ezra 8:22.

6. What did he do with the treasures contributed by the king, his nobles and the Jews of Babylon? Ezra 8:4-30.

7. What did he say to the priests charged with the treasures? Ezra 8:28.

8. How long were Ezra and his company on the journey? Ezra 8:31; comp. 7:9.

9. What did Ezra say concerning the providence of God on the journey? Ezra 8:31.

10. Describe the arrival at Jerusalem

and what was done? Ezra 8:32-36.

Note: About 1,700 perons, including heads of families and their servants (Ezra 8:1-14), priests, Levites, and 220 Nethinim, or servants who assisted in the work about the temple, composed the company. There was no force employed in making up the company, but whoever "were minded of their own free will to go," joined the caravan (Ezra 7:13).

Note: While Ezra refused a guard of soldiers to accompany his people on their journey to Jerusalem, Nehemiah, also a devoted believer in Jehovah, accepted one (Neh. 2:9). Thus good and devout men have different ways of showing their faith and of doing the will of the Lord.

11. What prudent measures did Ezra employ against dishonesty? Ezra 8:29, 30.

12. What three essential qualifications did Ezra possess for his future work? Ezra 7:10.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESAMENT.

The three things to which Ezra set his heart were worthy of his zeal. They were (1) to seek the law of the Lord; (2) to do it; and (3) to teach it.

Jesus taught that they that seek shall find; and they who ask shall obtain, and that to them who knock it shall be opened. It is imperative to do God's will if one knows it, and, moreover, to know it truly one must desire and will to do it (Jno. 7:17). In many sermons the emphasis is put upon faith rather than upon the obedience of faith. Hence the church inclines to rest upon the fact that it be-

lieves rather than to arouse itself to do the will of God. Dr. J. G. Holland has a splendid essay in his "Gold Foil" on "Receiving and Doing" in which he speaks of the danger of listening to and learning, without corresponding obedience to, the message of God. The call of God is always for consecration in order to service. It does not matter so much as to the amount or specific kind or service rendered as it does that we shall exercise our selves unto godliness and brotherliness, keeping up the strong spirit of endeavor in the name of Christ.

Lesson IX.

November 26.

NEHEMIAH'S PRAYER

Nehemiah 1.

GOLDEN TEXT—The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working.
James 5:16.

Memory Verse—9. **Time**—445 B. C. **Places**—Shushan and Jerusalem. **Persons**—Nehemiah, Hanani and certain other Jews.

DAILY READINGS.

- Nov. 20.... M—Neh. 1—Nehemiah's Prayer.
 Nov. 21.... T—Neh. 2:1-8—Nehemiah's Prayer Answered.
 Nov. 22.... W—Num. 14:1-19—Moses' Prayer for the Israelites.
 Nov. 23.... T—1 Sam. 7:3-14—Samuel's Prayer for God's Protection.
 Nov. 24.... F—Dan. 9:1-23—Daniel's Prayer Instantly Answered.
 Nov. 25.... S—Acts 12:1-19—The Prayer of the Church for Peter.
 Nov. 26.... S—John 17:1-26—The Prayer of Jesus for His Disciples.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

For the location of Shushan see Geographical Notes on the lesson for Nov. 5. The palace in which Esther was queen and which had been built by Darius had in the meantime been destroyed by fire. On its site, however, Artaxerxes, the king in Nehemiah's time, had built a yet more

splendid one. There has been discovered "a magnificent piece of painted and glazed tile representing striding lions, which formed the decoration of the pillared porticoes." An inscription on it bears the name of Artaxerxes. It was probably part of the palace in which Nehemiah was the cup-bearer.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

Although the book of Nehemiah was not originally a separate work from Ezra, it is easy to see why the division was made just at this point. In the first place an interval of about thirteen years comes between Ezra's reformation and the beginning of the history of Nehemiah. In the second place, a still more weighty reason for the division at this point is because a new character is introduced. The book is correctly called the book of Nehemiah because it is largely devoted to his actions. More than half of the book is autobiographical. He tells us nothing of his previous history. His father, Hachaliah, is nothing more to us than a name. He was the cup-bearer of

the king. This was not an important political office like that held by Joseph and by Daniel, but was merely a position in the palace.

To hold it a man had to be trustworthy and in many cases it was a stepping-stone to a higher position. There is no reason to think that Nehemiah belonged to some noble family. It is true that he was appointed governor, the same position held by Zerubbabel, but this was probably due to the fact that he was a court favorite rather than that he belonged to the princely family. He was quite likely chosen as an attendant upon the king originally because of personal beauty and attractiveness.

Nehemiah is conspicuous for his patri-

1 The words of Nehemiah the son of Hachaliah.

Now it came to pass in the month Chislew, in the twentieth year, as I was in Shushan the palace 2 that Hanani, one

of my brethren, came, he and certain men out of Judah; and I asked them concerning the Jews that had escaped, that were left of the captivity, and concerning Jerusalem. 3 And they said unto me,

otism and for his religious zeal. But it was not the hardships of the captive life which drove him to take up this work. It was not continually brooding over wrongs inflicted upon him and his people which fostered in him the aspiration to rebuild his ancestral city. Among all the captive Jews there is no one in whom we should so little expect a high measure of patriotism as in the favorite servant of a heathen court. These considerations can not fail to exalt the character of Nehe-

miah. He was faithful in his lower office and this was a guarantee of equal faithfulness in a higher position. "Outwardly he is the most foreign Jew we meet with in Scriptures, yet in life and character he is the very ideal of a Jewish patriot.

His patriotism shines all the more splendidly because it bursts out of a foreign environment. Thus Nehemiah shows how little the dialect and the manners he exhibits can be taken as the gauge of a man's true life." (Adeney.)

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

The time, the place and the circumstances of this incident in Nehemiah's life are all fully recorded. It was in the month Chislew, which corresponds to our December. The name of this month is Assyrian and Babylonian, and the fact that it and the later month Nisan are both recorded in the twentieth year of Artaxerxes (1:1 and 2:1) show that he follows the Babylonian custom of beginning the year in the autumn and not the

Jewish one of beginning it in the spring. It was in the fortress of Susa, in the great palace the ruins of which astonish the traveler to this day. His brother Hanani and some other Jews had recently come from Jerusalem and they sought out the man in the palace as probably the one of the Jewish colony who had the greatest influence. To him they told the depressing story of Jerusalem's desolate condition.

EXPLANATORY.

1. **The words of Nehemiah, etc.:** This is the title of the book. Nehemiah is the only historical book in the Old Testament which has such a title. **Son of Hachaliah:** This distinguishes him from another Nehemiah mentioned in Ezra 2:2 and Neh. 3:16. Nothing more is known of his father. Inasmuch as his ancestors' sepulchers were in Jerusalem (2:3) it is probable that Nehemiah belonged to the tribe of Judah. **The month Chislew:** The ninth month of the Babylonian year, corresponding nearly to our December.

The twentieth year: Of Artaxerxes' reign, as may be seen by comparing 2:1 **Shushan the place:** See Geographical Notes. The word translated palace is not the usual one for the king's house. It indicates that it was a stronghold. The marginal reading is castle.

2. **Hanani, one of my brethren:** This language might admit of our regarding Hanani as a more or less distant relative of Nehemiah, but in 7:2 he speaks of him again as "my brother." It is probable that he was his own brother. **The Jews that**

The remnant that are left of the captivity there in the province are in great affliction and reproach: the wall of Jerusalem also is broken down, and the gates thereof are burned with fire.

4 And it came to pass when I heard these words, that I sat down and wept, and mourned certain days; and I fasted and prayer before the God of heaven, 5 and said, I beseech thee, O Jehovah, the God of heaven, the great and terrible God, that keepeth covenant and loving-kindness with them that love him and keep his commandments: 6 let thine ear

now be attentive, and thine eyes open, that thou mayest hearken unto the prayer of thy servant, which I pray before thee at this time, day and night, for the children of Israel thy servants, while I confess the sins of the children of Israel, which we have sinned against thee. Yea, I and my father's house have sinned; 7 we have dealt very corruptly against thee, and have not kept the commandments, nor the statutes, nor the ordinances, which thou commandedst thy servant Moses. 8 Remember, I beseech thee, the word that thou commandedst

had escaped, etc.: The Jews in Judah who had returned in the caravans of Zerubbabel and Ezra. **Concerning Jerusalem:** Nehemiah therefore asked about the welfare of the people and the condition of the city.

3. In the province: In the province of Judah (Ez. 5:8). **Great affliction and reproach:** The first word describes their condition and the second the attitude of their enemies to them. **The wall of Jerusalem, etc.:** This describes the condition in which the city was left by its enemies. Breaches were made in its walls and its gates were destroyed. This would leave it defenceless. What enemy had left the wall in this condition? Does Hanani refer to the breaking down of the walls by Nebuchadnezzar? That was in 588 B. C., one hundred-and forty-three years before. This was well-known to Nehemiah and it is scarcely conceivable that he would weep afresh over this. If he had reason to expect that they had been repaired by this time, we should expect from Hanani language to indicate that they were still in a state of disrepair and not what he does say. In Ezra 4:6-23 there is an account of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, but their enemies make complaint to Artaxerxes, the very king of Nehemiah's time. They say the walls have been

built (v. 12). The king ordered the work stopped. It seems that the enemies exceeded their commission and wrought the havoc which Hanani relates to Nehemiah. This will account for his tears. It was a fresh injury to the city.

4. I sat down and wept: It is this which shows that the news was unexpected. **Certain days:** We can not determine how long he gave way to his grief. **The God of heaven:** A favorite Persian title for God used frequently in Nehemiah. It probably means the God who dwelt in heaven.

5. At this point the prayer begins. The entire fifth verse is devoted to the address to God. It is quite like the beginning of the prayer in Dan. 9:3. It emphasizes the divine power which is able to restore the city and the divine mercy which alone will bestow it.

6. The first part of this verse presents the humility of Nehemiah as he requests a kindly attitude on the part of God towards his people. **I confess the sins of the children of Israel:** Nehemiah identifies himself with the people in their sins. He then confesses personal sins and the sinfulness of his family.

8-10. In these verses Nehemiah appeals to the threat and the promise of God. First is the threat of dispersion for

thy servant Moses, saying, If ye trespass, I will scatter you abroad amongst the peoples: 9 but if ye return unto me, and keep my commandments and do them, though your outcasts were in the uttermost part of the heavens, yet I will gather them from thence, and will bring them unto the place that I have chosen, to cause my name to dwell there. 10 Now

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these are thy servants and thy people, whom thou hast redeemed by thy great power, and by thy strong hand. 11 O Lord, I beseech thee, let now thine ear be attentive to the prayer of thy servant, and to the prayer of thy servants, who delight to fear thy name; and prosper, I pray thee, they servant this day, and grant him mercy in the sight of this man. (Now I was cupbearer to the king.)

sin (v. 8). Such threats are to be found in Lev. 26:33; Deut. 4:27; 28:64; 30:3. Next is the promise that God will gather back the outcasts on condition they repent (v. 9). They were to be gathered back to the place that God had chosen, and where he had placed his name. This refers to Jerusalem and to the temple. These two verses are not exact quotations of any single passage of Scripture, but sum up the thought of a number of passages in the Law.

10. Now these are thy servants, etc.: God had promised to restore the outcasts. Those at Jerusalem were in former times such outcasts. They had returned to God and had confessed their sins, and could therefore claim the fulfillment of God's promise. This has only been partly done. Since he has commenced his work of restoration, Nehemiah pleads that God complete it. By the reference to God's redeeming them he alludes to the original deliverance from Egypt. This was always God's great redemptive act in the history of Israel.

11. I beseech thee: This verse states the definite objects for which Nehemiah petitions God. They are two: (1). That

his own prayer and the prayer of all worshipping servants of God may receive divine attention, and (2) that the petition which Nehemiah has already purposed to make to the king may be successful. This man: King Artaxerxes. Since his name has not yet been mentioned he adds the parenthetical words to explain who is meant. Cupbearer to the king: "He was a palace slave." But among the palace servants he would take a high position. The cup-bearers had a special privilege of admission to the august presence of their sovereign in his most private seclusion. The king's life was in their hands; and the wealthy enemies of a despotic sovereign would be ready enough to bribe them to poison the king, if only they proved to be corruptible. The requirement that they should first pour some wine into their own hands and drink the sample before the king, is an indication that fear of treachery haunted the mind of an oriental monarch as it does the mind of a Russian Czar to-day. Thus the cup-bearers would become "favorites." "At all events, it is plain that Nehemiah was regarded with peculiar favor by the king he served."

COMMENTS.

Nehemiah's Patriotism. The principal motive which Nehemiah manifests in this prayer is patriotism. Later on in the history he manifests religious zeal,

but that does not emerge into view at first. His patriotism differs from that of Mordecai. The latter felt an interest in the race of living Jews; Nehemiah feels

an interest in the city, but because it contains the sepulchres of his fathers. It is patriotism, therefore, which springs from filial feeling. As soon as Nehemiah has commenced his work he develops in addition to this a true and deep concern for the welfare of the citizenry of Jerusalem. His patriotism, therefore, is strong and comprehensive.

Nehemiah's Peril. "If Nehemiah had only been roused to repair the ravages of the old Babylonian invasions, there would have been nothing very courageous in his undertaking. Babylon itself had been overthrown and the enemy of Babylon was now in power. Anything tending to obliterate the destructive glory of the old fallen empire might be accepted with favor by the Persian ruler. But the case is quite altered when we think of the more recent events.

"The very work Nehemiah was to undertake had been attempted but a few years before, and it had failed miserably. The rebuilding of the walls had then excited the jealousy of neighboring peoples, and their gross misrepresentation had resulted in an official prohibition of the work. This prohibition, however, had only been executed by acts of violence, sanctioned by the government. Worse than all else, it was from the very Artaxerxes whom Nehemiah served that the sanction had been obtained.

"He was an easy-going sovereign, readily accessible to the advice of his ministers; in the earlier part of his reign he showed remarkable favor towards the Jews when he equipped and dismissed Ezra on his expedition, and it is likely enough that in the pressure of his multitudinous affairs the king would soon forget his unfavorable decree. Nevertheless he was an absolute monarch, and the lives of his subjects were in his hands. For a personal attendant of such a sovereign to show sympathy with a city that had come under his disapproval was a very risky thing. Nehemiah may have

felt this while he was hiding his grief from Artaxerxes. But if so, his frank confession at the first opportunity reflects all the more credit on his patriotism and the courage with which he supported it."

"The God of Heaven." "He opens his prayer with an expression that seems to be more Persian than Jewish. He does not make his appeal to Jehovah as the 'God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob,' but after the sacred name he adds the descriptive title 'God of heaven.' This is quite a favorite phrase of Nehemiah's. Thus in describing his interview with Artaxerxes he says, 'So I prayed to the God of heaven;' and at Jerusalem he answers the mockery of his opponents by exclaiming, 'The God of heaven, he will prosper us.' Now the same expression is found repeatedly in the chronicler's version of royal edicts—in the edict of Cyrus, in the edict of Darius, in the edict of Artaxerxes. If it is indeed of Persian origin, the use of it by Nehemiah is most significant. In this case, while it indicates the speaker's unconscious adoption of the language of his neighbors and shows him to be a Jew of oriental culture, it also illustrates a far-reaching process of Providence. Here is an exalted name for God, the origin of which is apparently Gentile, accepted and used by a devout Jew, and through his employment of it passing over into the Scriptures, so that the religion of Israel is enriched by a phrase from abroad."

Unceasing Prayer. "His prayer, he here says, is offered 'day and night'; so his report of it may be regarded as a sort of final summing up of a long, persevering succession of prayers. The unwearying persistence of the man reveals two favorable features in his character—his earnestness of purpose and his unflagging faith. Our Lord denounces 'vain repetitions'—i. e., repetitions the very value of which is thought to reside in their number, as though prayer could be estimated arithmetically. But the prayer that is

repeated simply because the worshiper is too persistent to be satisfied till it is answered does not come into the category of 'vain repetitions'; it is anything but empty."

Their Real Enemy. "The startling news of the ruinous condition of the recently restored city of Jerusalem rouses a sort of national conscience in his breast. He knows that the captivity was brought about as a chastisement for the sins of the Jews. The great lesson—so recklessly ignored when it was insisted on by Jeremiah—had been burnt into the *deepest* convictions of the exiles. Therefore Nehemiah makes no complaint of the cruel behavior of the enemies of Israel. He does not whine about the pitiable plight of the Jews. Their real enemies were their sins, and the explanation of their present distress was to be found in their own bad conduct."

He Shares their Sin. "Living far from the seat of evil, himself a God-fearing, upright man, he might have been tempted to treat the citizens of Jerusalem as Job's comforters treated the patriarch of Uz, and denounce their sins from the secure heights of his own virtue. In declining to assume this pharisaic attitude, Nehemiah shows that he is not thinking of recent specific sins committed by the returned exiles. The whole history of Israel's apostasy is before him; he feels that the latter as truly as the earlier calamities flow from this one deep, foul fountain of iniquity. Thus he can join himself with his fathers and the whole nation in utterance of confession . . . It is a mark

of self-knowledge and true humility, as well as of patriotism, that he honestly associates himself with his fellow-countrymen. He perceives that particular sins, such as those found in the recent misconduct of the Jews, are but symptoms of the underlying sinful character, and that while circumstances may save the individual from the temptation to exhibit every one of these symptoms, they are accidental, and they can not be set to his credit. The common sin is in him still; therefore he may well join himself to the penitents, even though he has not participated in all their evil deeds."

A Model Prayer. "When we glance back over the prayer as a whole, we are struck with its order and progress. As in our Lord's model prayer, the first part is absorbed with thoughts of God; it is after uplifting his thoughts to heaven that the worshiper comes down to human need. Then a large place is given to sin. This comes first in the consideration of man, after the worshiper has turned his eyes from the contemplation of God and felt the contrast of darkness after light. Lastly, the human subjects of the prayer begin in the wider circles of the whole nation; only at the very last, in little more than a sentence, Nehemiah brings forward his own personal petition. Thus the prayer gradually narrows down from the divine to the human, and from the national to the individual; as it narrows it becomes more definite, till it ends in a single point; but this point is driven home by the weight and force of all that precedes." (Adeney).

THE LESSON STORY.

Nehemiah appears suddenly on the scene and gives no information as to his former life, except that he was the son of Hachabiah. He had a brother Hanani who had been to Jerusalem and brought him news as to the condition of the Jews. Prof. Willis J. Beecher says: "We must

think of him as a very young man, hardly yet grown-up handsome, well bred a favorite, highly gifted, with a position at court, opportunity to make his way, and of such examples of possible success before him as Daniel, Mordecai and Esther." He was cup-bearer to the king.

We learn that he was indeed a favorite at court and possessed real influence with the king. His position furnished him an opportunity to acquire great wealth which he used for the good of his countrymen (Neh. 5:18). Although honored at the court of a great country he had Jerusalem written deep upon his heart and the grief of the Jewish people was a grief to him. He knew how to feel deeply for others and particularly for the nation which God had chosen and favored.

He was a very religious man, full of the spirit of prayer and consecration. He was true to his conviction and feared the God of heaven with his whole heart. He manifested remarkable wisdom and practical shrewdness, as we shall see later.

He was courageous, as are all the true servants of the living God. He was exceedingly resourceful and capable in times of emergency. He was gentlemanly and courteous in his demeanor, having a noble heart and courtly training. A criticism offered against him is that he was well pleased with himself. But this may be a virtue, especially if one have good cause for pleasure in himself.

If one have a clear conscience; if he love his neighbor; if he fulfill his duty with joy and singleness of heart—who can object to his pleasing himself? Certainly it did not make him proud and vain-glorious. Certainly it did not detain him from prayer and confession of sin. It did not make him indolent or hard-hearted.

Charles Reade speaks of him as: "Faithful courtier, yet true patriot; child of luxury, yet patient of hardships; inventive builder, impromptu general, astute politician, high-spirited gentleman, inspired orator, resolute reformer; born leader of men, yet humble before God." In spite of the temptations of the palace, opportunities for luxury and the pleasures of sin, Nehemiah became a rugged reformer and leader of his people, as did Moses notwithstanding the allure-

ments and temptations of the court of Egypt. It would have been difficult at the time of the captivity to understand why God should send the Hebrews to Babylon to cure them of idolatry which multiplied reproofs and punishments could not overcome in Jerusalem. But God was wiser than men and knew well what he was permitting and why, to develop a better character in the people of his choice.

Adam Smith has said: "The chief lesson which Nazareth teaches us is the possibility of a pure home and a spotless youth in the very face of the evil world."

It was a great relief to Nehemiah to be able to pour out his heart before God. He did not stop with one prayer nor with ten prayers, but kept on pouring out his heart before the Lord for months. Both Nehemiah and the king needed the wisdom and guidance asked for in the prayers. Nehemiah wept, mourned, fasted and prayed. He could not bear the dishonor that had fallen upon his people in Jerusalem. He could not endure that the name of Jehovah should be lowered in the esteem of every man. Every great revival begins with deep yearning on the part of some child of God who longs for seasons of refreshing from the presence of the Lord. Nehemiah freely confessed the sins of the children of Israel in their behalf; he appealed to the great promises of God; he recalled God's goodness and mercy in helping his people in the past; and he was sure that the answer should be given to his request.

The most impressive thing about Nehemiah's prayer is that in it he was so deeply moved, not for his own personal comfort or honor or safety, but for the nation which God had elected for a great providential purpose. O that men would be deeply moved, filled with compassion—as was Jesus—for those who like sheep are going astray! One of the essentials of a successful church is that it shall suffer with the Lord; shall travail until

Christ be formed in the hearts of men. A church that does not suffer at the sight of the sins and the indifference of sinners is not, and can not be, the true church of Christ; the bride of him who suffered the just for the unjust to bring them to God.

There is a sublimity in the feeling which prompted Nehemiah's prayers.

When we can share another's sorrow, bear another's burden and especially grieve over another's sins and be willing to share his burdens to save him—this is to be Christlike.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. After arriving at Jerusalem what was Ezra told concerning many of the Palestinian Jews? Ezra 9:1-2.

2. How was this teacher and reformer affected by this information? Ezra 9:3-5.

3. What confession did he make for the people and himself? Ezra 9:6-15.

4. What occurred during his confession and prayer? Ezra 10:1.

5. What did Shecaniah confess and

suggest to Ezra at this time? Ezra 10:2-4.

6. What did Ezra make the priests, Levites and all Israel to swear? Ezra 10:5.

7. What radical proclamation was issued? Ezra 10:7-8.

8. What course was suggested at the assembly as to mixed marriage? Ezra 10:12-14.

9. What is the appropriate application of the Golden Text of last week's lesson?

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. Who came to Nehemiah with news that distressed him? Neh. 1:2.

2. What did he ask them and what did they answer him? Neh. 1:2-3.

3. What immediate effect did this news have upon the spirit of Nehemiah? Neh. 1:4.

4. What was the particular office or business of Nehemiah? Neh. 1:11.

5. What acknowledgment did he make concerning God? Neh. 1:5.

6. What petition did he make with respect to his petitions for Israel? Neh. 1:6.

7. What humble confession did he make for Israel, himself and his father's house? Neh. 1:6-7.

8. What did he ask of the Lord to remember as to the scattering and the return of his people Israel? Neh. 1:8-9.

9. What did he say in identification of the Jews as God's servants? Neh. 1:10.

10. To whose prayers did he beseech the Lord to be attentive? Neh. 1:11.

11. For what very definite answer did Nehemiah ask Jehovah? Neh. 1:11.

12. What is the Golden Text for this week and why appropriate? Jas. 5:13.

13. How long after Ezra's return occurred the events of this lesson? Thirteen years.

Note: While Ezra's home was in Babylon, Nehemiah's home was in Shushan, about 250 miles further east.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. The subject of prayer is a suggestive and vital one. Jesus was a conspicuous example of prayer. The prayers of Jesus mentioned in the New Testament were many and we are sure that those unmentioned were far more numerous than

those to which reference is made. All the great characters of the Bible were persons of great prayer. All the great men of the church since the Bible was written have been likewise men of prayer. But prayer is not understood in heathen

lands, nor is it really comprehended by many who profess to follow the Lord.

To pray in order to bestow the answer upon one's pleasure is to miss the answer. To pray while harboring unforgiveness or iniquity in one's heart is to pray in vain. There is no promise to any prayer offered contrary to the will of God. The Holy Spirit helpeth our infirmities, making intercession for us according to the will of God. The one secret of success in prayer is to ask in the name of Christ (Jno. 14:13-14). To ask in his name means to ask according to his will, in harmony with his character and spirit.

"If ye abide in me," said our Saviour, "and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you."

There is a philosophy in that declaration well worth studying. If we abide in Christ and his word abide in us we will not desire nor pray for anything contrary to his will. How could we, while abiding in him and allowing his words to abide in our hearts? Happy is the man who knows how to seek the divine will, to obey it and to pray always according to that will. It would be a contradiction to

obey God and yet to pray for one's own will to be done instead of praying that the divine will be accomplished. We need have no fear to pray always, "Thy will be done," for God desires for us far more wisely, lovingly and graciously than we could desire for ourselves. God's will is good will.

2. One good thing about trouble is that it drives the believing soul to God. Out of anguished hearts the most precious prayers have arisen just as the blackest soils grow the richest fruits. No doubt Ezra's radical measures in relation to marriage between the Israelites and the surrounding heathen had engendered much bitterness. Neither the husbands nor the wives involved in the great decision could appreciate it. Doubtless there had been many backslidings among the people since the reforms of Ezra. The reform was well intended and in and through its execution a real gain came to the nation. It is better to attempt improvement in the execution of the divine will—however bad the condition—than not to attempt it at all. It was a terrible ordeal to lift the nation to a higher level. Many had to suffer for sin, But sin must be forsaken.

Lesson X.

December 3.

NEHEMIAH REBUILDS THE WALLS OF JERUSALEM.

Neh. 4. (Print 6-18.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.
1 Cor. 16:13.

Memory Verses—16, 17. **Suggested Reading**—Neh. 2-5. **Time**—441 B. C. **Place**—The walls of Jerusalem. **Persons**—Nehemiah, Sanballat, Tobiah, representatives of neighboring nations and the returned Jews.

DAILY READINGS.

Nov. 27....M—Neh. 4:1-23—Nehemiah Rebuilds the Walls of Jerusalem.
Nov. 28....T—Neh. 2:9-20—Nehemiah's Proposal to Rebuild.
Nov. 29....W—Neh. 2:1-32—The Method of Rebuilding.
Nov. 30....T—Neh. 5:1-19—The Cry of the Poorer People.
Dec. 1.....F—Josh. 1:19—An Exhortation to be of Good Courage.
Dec. 2.....S—2 Sam. 10:6-14—Determining to Play the Man.
Dec. 3.....S—Rom. 8:26-39—"If God is for us, who is against us?"

TOPOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

"Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem on the lines on which they had run before the exile: That is, the walls again enclosed both the east and the southwest hills. From somewhere about the present citadel they ran on the brow of the southwest hill above Hinnom, south and then east to the Fountain Gate near the mouth of the central valley, crossed this below Siloam, on one of the five lines discovered by Dr. Bliss, continued north up the brow of the east hill above Kidron towards the Temple enclosure, ran under this and then round the Temple mount, west and southwest on the unknown line of the Second Wall of Josephus back to the point from which we have started. On this circuit there were eight, perhaps nine, gates, the Gate of the Gai at the southwest corner, the Dung-Gate

on the south stretch, the Fountain Gate at the southeast corner, a Water-Gate on Ophel, apparently a Horse-Gate, probably an East-Gate under the Temple, and on the north stretch, the Sheep-Gate, the Fish-Gate, and the Old-Gate, which may have been the same as the Corner-Gate. The same amount of labor was not required on every part of this circuit; wall and gates seem to have been much less ruined on the west and south stretches than on the east and north. The stones for repair lay to hand in the ruins themselves, hence the short time the repairs occupied. Whether the timber that Nehemiah required from the King's Forest was used for a course in the walls, as in the case of Solomon's Wall round the Temple, or only for the posts and doors of the Gates, is uncertain." (G. A. Smith.)

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

Four months, from December till April, pass before Nehemiah makes any attempt to have the petition of his prayer fulfilled. He had prayed that God should grant him mercy in the sight of the king and prosper his undertaking, but he is long in making any move to let the king know his wishes. There were probably good reasons for the delay. The winter season was unfavorable to traveling. There may have been many cupbearers, and during much of the time Nehemiah may not have been in service.

It was dangerous to ask permission to quit the service of the king, for an unfavorable construction might be put on such a request. Herodotus tells that Darius and Xerxes put some to death for hesitating to follow the king. Added to this was the fact that this very king Artaxerxes had once given command to stop the building of Jerusalem and had permitted its enemies to make a raid upon it (Ezra 4:7, 17-23). Nehemiah was therefore asking to do the very thing which the king had once forbidden.

Would not the king be incensed by such a request? All of these considerations and probably more were being continually weighed in the mind of Nehemiah until they bore their impression upon his countenance. In spite of his effort at self-control and to present a cheerful bearing, the king observed that something was amiss, and knowing that he was not ill, inquired as to the cause of his servant's mental distress. Nehemiah was alarmed, but this was the occasion for which he had prayed, and he told the king of the desolate and ruined condition

of the city in which were the graves of his ancestors. The king knew that this bit of information was but the basis of some definite request, but his command to Nehemiah to state his petition deepens the alarm of his servant. An inaudible prayer is made and the request stated. The king was kindly disposed and the petition of Nehemiah granted. He is given permission to rebuild the city and is granted the necessary material for the purpose. Nehemiah departed and made the journey safely. He remained in Jerusalem for three days without stating to any one what his object in coming was. On the third night, attended by only a few friends, he made a careful inspection of the walls. He then summoned the people and informed them of his purpose and showed them his authority. This message inspired all with enthusiasm, and they parted exclaiming, "Let us build!" Their enemies attempted to construe this as rebellion against the king, but Nehemiah and his friends did not permit themselves to be intimidated by such opposition nor were they willing to make friendly alliances with their foes. The wall of the city was divided into sections and each section was assigned to some group of people such as the inhabitants of a portion of the city or of a neighboring town, for the people of Judah were interested in having Jerusalem strongly fortified, that they might have a place of resort in case of war. It was not a matter of building the wall afresh, but of repairing it. From the references it is evident that in certain places the wall was almost intact, though in others it was quite razed to the ground.

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

The bitter opposition to the building of the city seems strange to us, removed as we are at such a distance from the events. There were a number of reasons, but they all merge into one, which is

class hatred. The Jews were exclusive. They would have nothing to do with non-Jews. Ezra had incited the Jews to dismiss their foreign wives, and this had deepened the hostility. Their enemies

6 So we built the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto half *the height* thereof: for the people had a mind to work.

7 But it came to pass that, when Sanballat, and Tobiah, and the Arabians, the Ammonites, and the Ashdodites, heard

that the repairing of the walls of Jerusalem went forward, *and* that the breaches began to be stopped, then they were very wroth; 8 and they conspired all of them together to come and fight against Jerusalem, and to cause confusion therein. 9 But we made our prayer unto our

were grieved that one came to seek the welfare of the children of Israel (2:10). The leaders of the opposition were Sanballat, probably governor of Samaria, an Ammonite named Tobiah, and an Arabian, Geshem. Their next step was to charge Nehemiah with designing to commit an act of rebellion against the king (2:19). His credentials were sufficient answer to this charge. From vexation they passed to rage, and their mockery of the Jewish builders became bitter and cut-

ting. One declared the Jews could not achieve this task, and another affirmed that a fox, by leaping on the wall, would break it down. Nehemiah's reply is a prayer that God would turn their reproaches back onto their own heads, send them into captivity and overwhelm them with their own sins. In the meantime the work of building is pushed so that wall is reared to half its height, but this arouses their enemies to stronger opposition.

EXPLANATORY.

6. All the wall was joined together: All parts of the wall were built at the same time, so that the circle was complete, and each day's work added to the protection which it gave the city. *Unto half the height:* To half the intended height. The people had a mind to work: Nehemiah gives the credit to the people. The popular enthusiasm pushed the work rapidly.

7. Here all the foes of Jerusalem are mentioned. Sanballat was a prominent man of Samaria, perhaps the governor. Tobiah was an Ammonite, and in 2:10 is spoken of as *the servant*, but just what that means is not known. Associated with him in opposition were his fellow countrymen, the Ammonites. The Arabians had one prominent leader whose name is frequently mentioned. It was Geshem (2:19). The Ashdodites were dwellers on the Maritime coast, and were descendants of the Philistines. This con-

dition of affairs shows that the Persian government made no effort to prevent feuds and strife among the petty tribes subject to its authority. *Breaches began to be stopped:* The workers under Nehemiah began to close up the places in the wall that had been broken down. *Were very wroth:* Their anger reached a greater stage than that mentioned in v. 1.

8. *They conspired:* They entered into a compact. Their purpose was to fight if necessary, but to cause confusion at least. The arrival of troops outside of Jerusalem would check the work and embolden any that were disaffected.

9. *But we made our prayers, etc.:* The enemy did not accomplish their purpose, for no confusion was created. Nehemiah took two precautions. He prayed and posted sentinels to guard on their attack. He looked to God, but did not neglect human means of defense. Judah

God, and set a watch against them day and night, because of them. 10 And Judah said, The strength of the bearers of burdens is decayed, and there is much rubbish; so that we are not able to build the wall. 11 And our adversaries said, They shall not know, neither see, till we come into the midst of them, and slay them, and cause the work to cease. 12 And it came to pass that, when the Jews that dwelt by them came, they said unto us ten times from all places, Ye must return unto us. 13 Therefore set I in

the lowest parts of the space behind the wall, in the open places, I set *there* the people after their families with their swords, their spears, and their bows. 14 And I looked, and rose up, and said unto the nobles and to the rulers, and to the rest of the people, Be not ye afraid of them: remember the Lord, who is great and terrible, and fight for your brethren, your sons, and your daughters, your wives, and your houses.

15 And it came to pass, when our enemies heard that it was known unto us,

said: Beginning with this verse Nehemiah enumerates the difficulties which beset his progress. The first one arose from within. The Jews complained of exhaustion caused by excessive toil. There was probably much truth in this, and we are not to put it down as mutiny, though it suggested to Nehemiah that he could not rely upon them to defend themselves stubbornly.

11. Another difficulty was that the enemy was constantly threatening a secret and sudden attack. This made it necessary for Nehemiah to be constantly on the alert and to have sentinels posted all of the time. He could never rest perfectly easy nor securely.

12. The third obstacle was in the opposition and fear felt by the Jews who resided in outlying towns. **The Jews that dwelt by them:** The Jews that lived in towns adjacent to the territory of their enemy are meant. There were contingents working on the walls from Tekoah, Gibeon, Mizpah, Zanoah and Jericho (3:2-13). The people from these towns sent repeated word to their fellow-townsmen, demanding that they return. **Ten times:** This is not necessarily to be taken in the exact sense, but as meaning repeatedly. **From all places:** This means that the message demanding the return of the provincial Jews did not come from

one town only, but from all. This is the most satisfactory meaning that can be assigned to a difficult clause. **Ye must return to us:** These towns were deprived of the stronger men upon whom they relied for protection, and the neighbors are becoming more hostile. Hence they demand the return of their fellow townsmen for their own protection.

13. **Therefore:** Because of the difficulties enumerated in vs. 10-12. **Set I in the lowest places:** The true meaning seems to be that "Nehemiah stationed armed detachments under the cover of the wall, in the open spaces, where houses and buildings would not interfere with their movements." **After their families:** Nehemiah took advantage of the strong clan feeling. Such an arrangement would insure harmony and system.

14. **I looked:** This probably means that he inspected the guard. **Fight for you, etc.:** Homes, families and religion were all at stake.

15. **That it was known unto us:** Their proposed sudden attack. God had brought their counsel to nought: The human agency was the measures of Nehemiah. It is implied, though not stated, that the enemy abandoned their intention of making a sudden attack. **We returned, etc.:** They resumed work, though precautions were still needed.

and God had brought their counsel to nought, that we returned all of us to the wall, every one unto his work: **16** And it came to pass from that time forth, that half of my servants wrought in the work, and half of them held the spears, the shields, and the bows, and the coats of mail; and the rulers were behind all

the house of Judah. **17** They that builded the wall and they that bare burdens laded themselves; every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other held his weapon; **18** and the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me.

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16. Half of my servants: Those who had come with Nehemiah, his bodyguard. Half of them worked and the other half guarded. **The rulers were behind,** etc.: The princes were posted in the rear of the workmen ready at any moment to take command and repel an attack.

17. The builders, that is, the masons, and the burden-bearers laded themselves: Carried on their work armed. He toiled with one hand and carried his

weapon with the other. This means they were always alert and prepared.

18. His sword girded by his side: The masons did their work with their swords girded on them. In this way both hands would be free. **He that sounded the trumpet:** The workmen were scattered and Nehemiah kept the trumpeter near him to sound the alarm in case of need. He moved from place to place, directing the work and the defense. He was the life of the enterprise.

COMMENTS.

Nehemiah's Danger. The difficulties and the dangers under which Nehemiah labored were very real. His country was ringed around with determined and unscrupulous foes. His countrymen, by sending back the Gentile wives which they had married, had incurred the malice of all these neighbors. Up to this time they had successfully thwarted all efforts that the Jews had made to rebuild the fortifications of their capital. If they should be able to restrain the Jews in the future they would prevent the rise of what, in the past, was a powerful rival and has all the qualities to attain a similar greatness in the future. Nehemiah was aware of the peril of his enterprise and prepared for it with great skill. He kept his own counsel till the time is ripe; he thoroughly organizes his forces; he maps out the entire course of the wall, and divides it among forty-two companions,

and then rushes the work. With all of these preparations, however, success would not have been achieved without the excellent personality and leadership of Nehemiah. He manifests a number of characteristics that should be noted.

His Patriotism. It was the motive of patriotism which induced him to lead the caravan to Jerusalem. He was distressed because the city of his father's tombs was defenseless. But Nehemiah's patriotism does not consist solely in attachment to a long-dead past. He toils for the present city and its defenseless citizens, and his own example rouses from their lethargy the despondent Jews and sends them, full of enthusiasm, to their task of restoring the ruined defenses.

His Generosity. He was generous in purse and spirit. He abandoned a lucrative position and one of ease to bear the burdens of the despised people. He

contributed of his own wealth to achieve this enterprise. He tells us later that he did not take advantage of the many opportunities offered him to make profit, and even refrained from exercising his unquestioned right of collecting his sal-

the alert with the very thing done which will prevent the success of their schemes.

His Ability for Leadership. Added to all of these qualities there shines out one more, and that was his capable



BUILDING THE WALL.

ary as governor. Added to all of this was the praise and appreciation which he gives to the people. He says nothing in commendation of himself, but gives the praise to the workers. "The people had a mind to work."

His Prudence. In the midst of dangers Nehemiah is never caught off his guard. He makes full preparations before he takes the populace into his confidence. His crafty foes think to surprise him, but they find him ever on

leadership. Had he not possessed this he could never have roused the populace from the lethargy into which repeated failure and defeat had thrown them. His thorough organization shows that he knew how to plan and direct such an enterprise. It was inevitable that there should be much murmuring. The discontented he was able to satisfy by wise measures and to restrain the wealthy and powerful from oppressive acts. In the building of the wall he does not

make himself prominent; we get but one glimpse of him as he moves from place to place, with a trumpeter just behind him ready to sound the alarm, and prepared for defense at a moment's notice. We realize that he was the very soul of the enterprise.

His Defensive Measures. Against the plotting of his enemies and the misguided murmuring of his fellow Jews, Nehemiah had a number of defenses. The first was prayer. When he hears of conspiracy he made his prayer to God (v. 9). But his prayer was not without

works; he watched also. An unbroken watch was kept night and day. His workmen were armed, soldiers were on guard, and he must have had spies in the country to report the movements of the enemy. Then he encouraged his depressed workmen. He appealed to their faith in God and was able to send them to their tasks with new hope and courage. Added to these was a thorough arming of all available men. He gives first place to the spiritual defense, but this did not lead him to neglect the complete equipment of his men.

THE LESSON STORY.

In reading the story of Nehemiah we feel that we would like to know more about him. We would like to know his childhood history, how he came to be the cup-bearer to the great king Artaxerxes. We would like to know what were his social and domestic relations, what were his thoughts and prayers concerning his people before he heard the sad and distressing news of their poverty and disgrace, their lack of patriotism and piety in Jerusalem. We would like to know what were his ambitions and hopes, what was his age and what had been his experience. These things we would like to know because we feel strongly drawn to him because of his power to feel and suffer for others.

The actual erection of the wall, almost impossible with the small resources at Nehemiah's command, was only a meager part of his great task. The people themselves must be transformed into heroes like himself in order to carry the enterprise forward to success. Their spirits had been broken by a century of oppression. How could the patriotic impulse be created in all their hearts?

There were petty, clashing interests, as there are in every city whose citizens have only small ideals. There were priests, merchants, artisans, farmers, shepherds,

and common laborers to be fused into patriots. There were adversaries ready for assault who looked upon the feeble Jews of Jerusalem as their legitimate prey. These enemies conspired and sneered, scorned, threatened, but finally feared when they saw the mighty hand of God outstretched in behalf of Jerusalem.

The damage to the walls was very great; the rubbish lay in vast heaps. The task seemed well-nigh superhuman. But God was with his servant and gave him good hope. The investigation which Nehemiah and a few of his friends made at night of the real state of the ruins was not encouraging. The walls lay prone and broken and the gates had been consumed with fire. This godly business man from the court of Persia could hardly find his way through and around the ruined city. Perhaps one reason he went secretly and in the night to examine the extent of the ruin was to avoid prejudice and the spirit of pessimism. He looked at the evil case from what a great physician once called "the curative standpoint." He did not deny the reality of the ruin, as some people deny disease, sin, material existence and death. He admitted all he saw, but could say: "God and I are able—or God is able—to rebuild."

The hero of this lesson shows himself a man, a hero indeed, but chiefly so because of his unflinching trust and triumphant faith in God.

He was unselfish indeed. He was full of contagious enthusiasm. He was fertile in resources. He was sagacious in plans and leadership. He was a splendid organizer. He brought order out of chaos and victory out of defeat.

His work put the chosen people in a position in which they could hold up their heads in the presence of their enemies. He laid for them the foundation of their estate in which for the next five hundred years they were to fulfill their divine mission in preparing the world for the coming of the Messiah.

When God has a great task or enterprise to accomplish he chooses his man for the undertaking. Abraham, Moses, Joshua, Samuel, David and Nehemiah were mighty leaders. Nehemiah was "naturally gifted with superlative tact, courage, wariness and self-control, his long training at the Persian court had made him a past-master of the diplomatic art."

Nehemiah was wise in making a thorough investigation before announcing his intention or his plan. Many fail from lack of a proper knowledge of the diffi-

culties to be overcome. A great general wants to know the strength and the advantages of his enemy. One with ten thousand does not wish to go against an enemy with twenty thousand. One does not wish to lay the foundation unless he be able also to build. A physician does not risk a treatment of his patient until he has satisfied himself as to the nature of his disease. Every minister and every religious teacher should know the strength of Satan and sin and the peculiar disposition of those whom they would teach and lead to God. Pathology is as important a study for the physician as physiology or histology.

Be sure, therefore, as teachers, that you understand God and the truth to be taught. Be equally sure, also, that you understand the nature and the needs of the persons you would teach. What is their environment? What is their present knowledge? What are their chief impulses and ambitions? Who are their associates? What is the history of each? Just as Nehemiah made a complete examination of the walls and considered the necessities, so every teacher should seek a perfect knowledge of the needs and nature, the circumstances and history of every pupil. Here is where many a teacher fails utterly.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. Note: The object of this lesson is to show how the wall of Jerusalem, under the inspiring leadership of Nehemiah, and in the face of much opposition, was rebuilt.

2. How long after the completion of the second temple was it when news reached Nehemiah concerning the deplorable condition of the Jews in Judah and Jerusalem? Ans. 71 years, or from 516 to 445 B. C.

3. Name some of the characteristics

of Nehemiah that qualified him for the work of rebuilding the wall.

4. Where was Shushan located and how far was the distance to Jerusalem?

5. What were the indications of the great grief of Nehemiah over the conditions at Jerusalem?

6. What first request did Nehemiah make of Artaxerxes the king? Neh. 2:5.

7. What request did he make of the king for letters, and why? Neh. 2:7, 8.

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON AND BIBLE ANSWERS.

Note: One cause for the distress of Nehemiah was the disgrace of the defenseless condition of the city of his fathers.

1. Whom had the king sent to accompany Nehemiah to Jerusalem? Neh. 2: 9.

2. How were the enemies of the Jews affected by the arrival of Nehemiah? Neh. 2:9, 10.

3. After his arrival what did he do before he made known the purpose of his coming? Neh. 2:11-16.

4. How did he enlist the co-operation of all parties in his plans? Neh. 2:17-20.

5. What is said of the opposition of Sanballat, the Horonite? Neh. 4:1.

6. Before whom did he speak and what did he say? Neh. 4:2.

7. What did Tobiah, the Ammonite, declare about the wall? Neh. 4:3.

8. What prayer was offered in the face of such opposition? Neh. 4:4, 5.

9. What reason is assigned for the

great success in building the wall? Neh. 4:6.

10. When the breaches in the wall began to be stopped, what conspiracy was formed to put a stop to the work? Neh. 4:7, 8.

11. What two things did the builders do to withstand any attacks? Neh. 4:9.

12. What discouragement then arose from within the city? Neh. 4:10.

13. What panic seized the neighboring Jews, and what was their appeal? Neh. 4:12.

14. What precaution did Nehemiah take against the assaults threatened? Neh. 4:13.

15. What exhortation did Nehemiah make, and to whom? Neh. 4:14.

16. What did the enemies hear to discourage them? Neh. 4:15.

17. What new program did the Jews follow from that time forth in the work? Neh. 4:16-18.

18. What practical lesson may we learn from Neh. 4:6?

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. An oriental city without a wall in the days of Nehemiah was no city at all. It was a great disgrace for Jerusalem, the city of the Great King, to lie in heaps, unprotected against the violence and depredations of its enemies. The time had been sufficient since the first return for the introduction of great prosperity. The lack of prosperity indicated also a lack of religion. Even in the New Testament prosperity is reckoned as one of the fruits of religion. Not that it always follows, but naturally accompanies, obedience to God. Here is a passage: "Godliness is profitable for all things, having promise of

the life which now is, and of that which is to come." (1 Tim. 4:8.) Another is "Seek ye first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you." Matt. 6:33. Still another is, "Every one that hath left houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or children, or lands for my name's sake, shall receive a hundred-fold, and shall inherit eternal life." Matt. 19:29. Recently attention was called to the fact that piety and paint go together in the prosperity of country churches. If a church be not painted it is an indication that piety and missionary zeal are lacking.

Lesson XI.

December 10.

NEHEMIAH AND HIS ENEMIES.

Nehemiah 6. (Print 1-14.)

GOLDEN TEXT—Jehovah is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?

Psalm 27:1.

Memory Verse—11. Time—441 B. C. Places—Jerusalem and the plain of Ono.

Persons—Nehemiah, Sanballat Tobiah, Geshem, Shemaiah and Noadiah the prophetess.

DAILY READINGS.

Dec. 4.....M—Neh. 6:1-19—Nehemiah and His Enemies.

Dec. 5.....T—Psa. 27:1-14—The Lord is my Salvation, whom shall I fear?

Dec. 6.....W—Psa. 62:1-12—God is the Rock of my Strength.

Dec. 7.....T—Psa. 118:1-29—"It is better to Take Refuge in the Lord."

Dec. 8.....F—Eph. 6:10-20—"Be Strong in the Lord."

Dec. 9.....S—1 Cor. 16:1-13—Watch ye, quit you like Men.

Dec. 10....S—2 Tim. 2:1-13—Suffer Hardship as a Good Soldier.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Ono was a town built by Shemed, a Benjamite (1 Chron. 8:12). It has been identified with a village about six miles north of Lydia (called Lud in Neh. 11:35). The plain of Ono would, therefore, be a part of the Maritime Plain lying

to the west of the territory of the tribe of Benjamin. The journey thither would have necessitated Nehemiah's absence from the city for three or four days, and the purpose evidently was to waylay and kill him.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

The previous lesson tells of the completion of the walls about the city. It was achieved only by the most heroic toil and tireless perseverance. But there were other disadvantages under which the city suffered besides the unprotected state of its fortifications. There was a seamy side to the city's life. All was not large-minded zeal and patriotic devotion to the public welfare. "Famine-stricken men and women not only cried to Nehemiah for the means of getting corn for themselves and their families; they had a complaint to make against their brethren. Some had lost their

lands after mortgaging them to rich Jews. Others had even been forced by the money-lenders to sell their sons and daughters into slavery. They must have been on the brink of starvation before resorting to such an unnatural expedient."

"Nehemiah was not slow in recognizing the public need when it was brought under his notice by the cry of the distressed debtors. According to the truly modern custom of his time in Jerusalem, he called a public meeting, explained the whole situation, and appealed to the creditors to give back the

1 Now it came to pass, when it was reported to Sanballat and Tobiah, and to Geshem the Arabian, and unto the rest of

our enemies, that I had builded the wall, and that there was no breach left therein (though even unto that time I had not

mortgaged lands and remit the interest on their loans. This was agreed to at once, the popular conscience evidently approving of the proposal. Nehemiah, however, was not content to let the matter rest here. He called the priests, and put them on their oath to see that the promise of the creditors was carried out."

In support of his policy that no interest was to be collected by a Jew from his fellow Jew, Nehemiah cited his own

example as governor. Previous holders of this office had collected the revenues which were due, but Nehemiah took nothing. He did not take advantage of the poverty of the people and enrich himself by purchasing their land. He had kept open house, and at heavy expense to himself had bountifully fed all guests who came to his house. This had been his public policy, and in this way he corrected the evils under which his people groaned.

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

The previous lesson told of opposition to Nehemiah, but it was opposition to the work which he was trying to achieve rather than to him personally. Now the same enemies offer opposition to him personally, but it is underhanded and, as they think, cunningly concealed opposition. "Open opposition had totally failed. The watchful garrison had not once permitted a surprise. In spite of the persistent malignity of his enemies, Nehemiah had raised the walls all round the city, till not a breach remained anywhere. The doors had yet to be hung at the great gateway, but the fortification of Jerusalem had proceeded so far that it was hopeless for the enemy to attempt any longer to hinder it by violence. Accordingly, the leading antago-

nists changed their tactics. They turned from force to fraud—a method of strategy which was a confession of weakness. The antagonism to the Jews was now in a very different position from that which it had attained before Nehemiah had appeared on the scene, and when all Syria was moved and Artaxerxes himself won over to the Samaritan view. It was directly against the policy sanctioned by the king. In its impotence it was driven to adopt humiliating devices of cunning and deceit; and even these expedients proved to be ineffectual. It has been well remarked that the rustic tricksters from Samaria were no match for a trained courtier. Nehemiah easily detected the clumsy snares that were set to entrap him."

EXPLANATORY.

1. Sanballat, etc.: For a description of these enemies see Neh. 4:7 and notes in last Sunday's lesson. I had builded the wall: Nehemiah relates that the entire time consumed by the building was fifty-two days (v. 15). The time of this

lesson was evidently just a little before its completion, which was on the 25th day of the 6th month (Elul). This corresponds to the early part of September. Hence the time of the present lesson was late in August. Though even—

set up the doors in the gates), 2 that Sanballat and Geshem sent unto me saying, Come, let us meet together in *one of the villages in the plain of Ono*. But they thought to do me mischief. 3 And I sent messengers unto them, saying, I am doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you? 4 And they sent unto me four times after this sort;

and I answered them after the same manner. 5 Then sent Sanballat his servant unto me in like manner the fifth time with an open letter in his hand, 6 wherein was written, It is reported among the nations, and Gashmu saith it, that thou and the Jews think to rebel; for which cause thou art building the wall: and thou wouldest be their king, according to these words. 7 And thou hast also appointed

unto that time, etc.: By this clause Nehemiah shows that the report was not wholly accurate. It is true that the breaches were closed, but the gates were not yet hung. I had not set up the doors in the gates: This work would naturally be delayed till the last. It would require greater care and more skilled workmanship than the building of the wall. Temporary barricades would protect the gateways till more leisure could be obtained to hang the gates.

2. Sanballat and Geshem: It should be noticed that Tobiah and the other enemies are not mentioned. Probably they were to keep in the background in order to attack Jerusalem should this plot be successful. In the plain of Ono: They wished to get Nehemiah some distance from Jerusalem. This plain was not less than 25 or 30 miles away. They thought to do me mischief: Nehemiah explains by these words that he discovered the intention of the proposal.

3. His reply was firm yet respectful. He was responsible for the building of the wall. He had a commission from the king to perform it. That building would cease should he leave it, was probably the literal truth. While this statement would not gratify his enemies, Nehemiah has the consciousness of the wisdom and the truth of his reply.

4. After this sort, etc.: In v. 5 we are told that the second proposal was of "like manner" to the others. Hence

we are not to understand that they repeated the invitation to come to the plain of Ono four times, but that there was a general similarity in the four invitations and his responses to them. That which is called the second proposal was in fact the fifth.

5. An open letter: It was not sealed, and the purpose of this was, like that of every other open letter, that its contents might become public property. The servant would know what it contained, as would likewise Nehemiah's enemies within the city (v. 17). While the main purpose of the letter, therefore, was to frighten Nehemiah, it was also designed to spread alarm among his followers.

6. Gashmu, etc.: This is understood to be another form of Geshem. The charge was not merely vague rumor, but was asserted by persons of position and influence. The Jews think to rebel, etc.: The rumor, the truth of which Geshem asserted, contained two charges: (1) They intended to rebel against the Persian king. Such a charge was not without probability. The past history of Jerusalem made such an inference plausible, and their present eagerness to build the wall seemed to favor it; (2) Nehemiah was planning to become king in Jerusalem. If the first had any support the second charge would naturally be accepted.

7. Appointed prophets to preach

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from his avowed enemies, nor did it seek to induce him to leave the security of the city. It came from a prophet, Shemaiah, into whose house Nehemiah had gone, but whether of his own intention or at the invitation of the prophet is not stated. In either case he was a false friend. He proposed to Nehemiah that they together take refuge in the temple, and by shutting the door, do away with the possibility of an assassin slaying Nehemiah. Possibly some attempt on his life had already been made. This proposal came from a prophet of God, a supposed friend. Within the temple Nehemiah would be secure, for the temple was the securest place in Jerusalem. The temples of the heathen were used as places of resort. But Nehemiah was shrewd enough to perceive that it was only another of his enemies' plots. He was not safe from their schemes even among his own people. To have taken refuge in the temple would have opened against him the charge of cowardice, and furthermore it would have offended the religious scruples of the Jews, for no layman, such as he, was permitted to enter the temple. His reply to Shemaiah is blunt and decisive, "I will not go in."

Nehemiah's Wisdom. "When we compare the wisdom of Nehemiah with the cunning of his enemies we notice a broad distinction between the two qualities. Sanballat and his fellow-conspirator, the

Arab Geshem, condescend to the meanness of deceit: they try to allure their victim into their power; they invite him to trust himself to their hospitality while intending to reward his confidence with treachery; they concoct false reports to blacken the reputation of the man whom they dare not openly attack; with diabolical craft one of their agents endeavors to tempt Nehemiah to an act of cowardice that would involve, apparently, a culpable breach of religious propriety, in order that his influence may be undermined by the destruction of his reputation. From beginning to end this is all a policy of lies. On the other hand, there is not a shadow of insincerity in Nehemiah's methods of frustrating it. He uses his keen intelligence in discovering the plots of his foes; he never degrades it by weaving counterplots. In the game of diplomacy he outwits his opponents at every stage. If he would lend himself to their mendacious methods, he might turn them round his finger. But he will do nothing of the kind. One after another he breaks up the petty schemes of the dishonest men who continue to worry him with their devices, and quietly hands them back the fragments, to their bitter chagrin. His replies are perfectly frank; his policy is clear as the day. Wise as the serpent, he is harmless as the dove. A man of astounding discernment, he is nevertheless "an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no guile." (Adeney.)

LESSON STORY.

Already we have considered the life of Nehemiah and will not go over the ground already covered, except to recapitulate somewhat a life so singularly pure, devout, unselfish, courageous, energetic, enthusiastic, sympathetic, masterly and loyal to God. His life is one of the most attractive in all the Old Testament. As suggested, his chief attraction is in the loving sympathy which he so deeply felt for others.

The poor and oppressed in Judah found

in Nehemiah a true and powerful friend. There arose a great cry of the people and of their wives against their brethren who oppressed them. They said: "We, our sons and daughters, are many; let us get grain that we may eat and live." Others said: "We are mortgaging our fields, vineyards and houses; let us get grain, because of the dearth." Others said they had borrowed money to pay their taxes to the king. Many said their sons and daughters were be-

ing brought into bondage to their brethren who were richer than themselves. Nehemiah was very indignant at such extortion and oppression as were common. He contended with the nobles for exacting usury. He called a great council against these oppressors. He said, "We have redeemed our brethren, and would you sell them?" The oppressors held their peace. Then he said, further, "Ought ye not to walk in the fear of God because of the reproach of the nations, our enemies?" Then setting the oppressors a good example in generous lending, he said: "Let us leave off this usury." He urged them to restore the vineyards, fields, oliveyards, and houses which they had taken. Then the money lenders consented and said: "We will restore them and will require nothing of them, even as thou sayest."

Those who profess the true religion and live heathenism are the worst enemies of God. Jesus contended with the oppressive and cruel Pharisees who devoured widows' houses and used religion for the praise of men and as a cloak for wickedness. Nehemiah rebuked the evil persons with indignation and plainly. He went farther and persuaded them to give up their evil deeds. He aroused public sentiment against their conduct. He set a good example. He even refused to draw the salary of the governor and bore the expenses of his own retinue. He believed in publicity. That public assembly which he called, and those reproofs which he publicly administered, did a world of good for all classes.

Nehemiah was not afraid of work. He was too busy to go down to meet his enemies who wanted to stop his progress. He was too wise to parley with his uncompromising enemies. He could say truly: "I am doing a great work; so I cannot come down." There is too much coming down from the Lord's work to contend with or compromise with the Lord's adversaries. Thus Nehemiah escaped a snare set for him. There are numerous critical questions arising with

reference to our religion. Theorists, speculators and critics insist upon arguments, speculations, theories and criticisms that may well be answered by saying: "We are too busy doing the great work of God to come down to foolish and untaught questions; we have no time for profitless discussions." We admire the men who have done things; have brought important reforms to pass. The closet and the cloister may serve men with quiet for speculation, but the church and the pulpit, the class-room and the Sunday-school—along with the religious journals—should remember that Jesus did not say: "Go ye into all the world and speculate," but "Go ye into all the world and preach the gospel."

Briefly to sum up the life of God's favored servant, Nehemiah, let us note:

1. He was a devout, prayerful and consistent believer in the living God. His office was at first not that of a prophet or priest, but simply that of a cup-bearer to the king. In his sphere he glorified God as did Daniel and others. He let his light shine. Indeed, so big was his heart for God that he could not conceal his true and deep feelings on the subject of religion.

2. He was courteous, polite and dutiful at all times. His countenance was sad for a great purpose, and although this was contrary to the etiquette of the court, he used it for the glory of Jehovah. He was obedient to the king. He was faithful even though his heart was breaking, and he was praying with every breath for his sorrowful brethren far away in Jerusalem. He was a man of deep conviction.

3. He was courageous. He did not conceal his feelings from the inquiring king. He feared at first, for the king had the power in his hands of life or death. But prayer and communion with God can prepare a sincere soul to face death rather than shrink from duty. He had asked divine guidance and was going to risk all consequences. Providence controlled the king and made him a true friend.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. When Nehemiah heard of the wretched state of the Jews in Jerusalem, what were his emotions and what did he do?

2. How many years elapsed between the completion of the second temple and Nehemiah's visit to Jerusalem? Neh. 1:1; comp. 2:1; and Ezra 6:15. (520 to 445 B. C.)

3. What does Nehemiah's conduct teach in regard to prayer?

4. To whom did Nehemiah ascribe the

favor received by him from the king? 2:18.

5. Mention some occasions on which Nehemiah displayed great tact in managing men and in carrying forward his purpose? Neh. 2:1-8, 12-18; 6:2-4, 10-12.

6. What did Nehemiah answer in reply to the taunts of his enemies? Neh. 4:4, 5.

7. Mention some of the hard obstacles overcome in rebuilding the wall.

QUESTIONS UPON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. How did Sanballat and his allies endeavor to entrap Nehemiah? Neh. 6:1-4.

2. This was after what news that distressed them? Neh. 6:1.

3. What message did Nehemiah send to them in reply to their invitation? Neh. 6:3.

4. What did this answer show as to Nehemiah's estimate of the work?

5. What did Sanballat then send to Nehemiah by his servant? Neh. 6:5, 6.

6. What very pointed reply did Nehemiah then return to Sanballat? Neh. 6:8.

7. What suggestion did Shemaiah make to Nehemiah to make him out a coward? Neh. 6:10.

8. What was Nehemiah's answer, and

from whom had the suggestion come? Neh. 6:11, 12.

9. How long were the Jews in rebuilding the wall? Neh. 6:15.

10. What effect was produced upon surrounding nations, and why? Neh. 6:16.

11. What was still another annoyance with which Nehemiah had to contend? Neh. 6:17, 18.

12. What was done preparatory to the dedication of the wall? Neh. 12:27-30.

13. What was the main feature of the dedication services? Neh. 12:31, 38, 40.

14. How did the people show their joy, and whom did they honor? Neh. 12:43.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. The enemies recognized in the New Testament are more subtle and dangerous than those who fought against God's people in the times of the Old Testament. "The weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but mighty before God to the casting down of strongholds, casting down imaginations, and every high thing that is exalted against the knowledge of God, and bringing

every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ." 2 Cor. 10:4-5. All imaginations and every thought and purpose must be subjugated to Christ our Lord.

2. The idea of *work* is very emphatic in the New Testament. "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard" (Matt. 21:28) is an excellent text for a sermon on Christian work. There is perhaps no better

one in the Old Testament on the subject than this: "So we built the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto half the height thereof: for the people had a mind to work." "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to work, for his good pleasure." "Faith," whatever may be said of it, "worketh by love." "Show me thy faith apart from thy works, and I, by my works, will show thee my faith." Faith without works is dead. We are at last to be judged according to our works. The world and God also will judge men according to their works. When this writer began his ministry—and for months before his first sermon—the text that kept sounding through his soul was the one already referred to: "Son, go work to-day in my vineyard;" and the one upon which he did preach his first sermon was the one suggested by this lesson on building the wall: "So we built the wall; and all the wall was joined together unto half the height thereof; *for the people had a mind to work.*" That work must be done in love. It must be the work of a son, not of a slave. But is there anything more needed to-day than that the whole church shall have "a mind to work," shall work in the vineyard

of the Lord, shall feed his sheep and manfully carry out his great commission?

3. There was organization for the work. So in the New Testament the principle of organization is laid down. It is illustrated in parable, miracle and historical example again and again. In the miracle of feeding the five thousand the Lord bade the disciples that they should make the multitude to sit down in companies so that they could be conveniently and systematically fed. There was organization, there was order. The Lord blessed the loaves and brake and gave to his disciples and they to the multitude. Order, "decency," as Paul says, should obtain in religion. In the parable of the great supper which the king made in honor of his son, for example, there was order in the giving of the invitation; order was observed in sending out the servants; order was observed at the feast and order prevailed from first to last. The principle of organization in teaching was introduced by the Lord himself in calling, teaching and training his disciples. It was used by Paul in ordaining bishops and in sending Timothy and Titus to set in order the things wanting in the churches.

Lesson XII.

December 17.

EZRA TEACHES THE LAW

Neh. 8. (Print 1-12.)

GOLDEN TEXT—The law of Jehovah is perfect, restoring the soul. Psa. 19:7.

Memory Verses—2, 3. Time—439 B. C. Place—The broad place before the Water Gate. Persons—Ezra, Nehemiah, Scribes and Levites.

DAILY READINGS.

Dec. 11.... M—Neh. 8:1-18—Ezra Teaches the Law.

Dec. 12.... T—Neh. 9:1-38—The Confession and Covenant.

Dec. 13.... W—Psa. 19:1-14—"The Law of the Lord is Perfect."

Dec. 14.... F—Psa. 119:153-160—"The Sum of the Word of Truth."

Dec. 15.... F—Psa. 119:97-112—"Thy Word is a Lamp unto my Feet."

Dec. 16.... S—Psa. 119:1-24—"Thy Word Have I Laid up in my Heart."

Dec. 17.... S—Col. 3:5-17—"Let the Word of Christ Dwell in you Richly."

TOPOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

"The water gate was obviously so called because the path leading from the spring of Gihon, the Virgin's spring, entered the city here. Water-carriers passing in and out gave the gate its name. It is the one spring of Jerusalem, known as the Virgin's Fountain to Christians, and as the Mother of Steps to Moslems, be-

cause of the steps which lead down into the vault from the present surface of the valley." (Condor.)

The *broad place* was in the open space which lay between the southeastern corner of the temple and the eastern wall of the city. It is mentioned again in Ezra 10:9 and Neh. 3:26.

HISTORICAL CONNECTION.

In this lesson we have the reappearance of the scribe Ezra, after an interval of twelve years. He was last mentioned in connection with the reform described in Ezra 9 and 10. Why he is not mentioned is a mystery. He may have been out of the city, having returned to Babylon after he had completed his work, or he may have been in the city but not active. He did not make a complete success of his reform, and this may have led him to take no part in public work till the rebuilding of the walls aroused the enthusiasm of the people and permitted him to renew his cherished work of teaching the law to the people. In the proceedings and enterprises which are described in Neh. 8-11, Ezra, and not Nehemiah, is the leading person. Nehe-

miah is present part of the time and exercises his office of governor, but in the purely religious matters the scribe is more prominent. The closing verses of chapter 6 tell of the successful completion of the wall and of further troubles which Nehemiah had with his opponents. In the seventh chapter there is a continuation of the governor's personal narrative, in which he describes how the watch was organized after the walls had been completed and how the gates were set up. He then adds that the city was large and the population was small, and this leads him to insert the list of Zerubbabel's pilgrims which he discovered in the public records. At this point Ezra and the reading of the law assume the position of prominence

1 And all the people gathered themselves together as one man into the broad place that was before the water gate; and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which Jehovah had commanded to Israel. 2 And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women, and all

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

Ezra had brought the book of the law with him from Babylon thirteen years before, but as yet he had found no opportunity to teach it to the people and to enforce its precepts. "The occasion for such a reception of it was found when the Jews were freed from the toil and anxiety that accompanied the building of the city walls. The chronicler says that this was in the seventh month; but he does not give the year. Considering the abrupt way in which he has introduced the section about the reading of the law, we can not be certain in what year this took place. If we may venture to take the narrative continuously, in connection with Nehemiah's story in the previous chapters, we shall get this occurrence within a week after the completion of the fortifications. This was on 'the twenty-fifth day of the month Elul' (Neh. 6:15); *i. e.*, the sixth month. The reading began on the 'first day of the seventh month.' (Neh. 8:2.) That is to say, on this supposition, it followed immediately on the first op-

portunity of leisure. Then the time was specially appropriate, for it was the day of the Feast of Trumpets, which was observed as a public holiday, and an occasion for an assembly, 'a *holy convocation*' (Lev. 23:24). On this day the citizens met in a favorite spot, the open space just inside the water gate, at the east end of the city, close to the temple, and now part of the Harem, or sacred enclosure. They were unanimous in their desire to have no more delay before hearing the law which Ezra had brought up to Jerusalem as much as thirteen years before. Why were they all on a sudden thus eager, after so long a period of indifference? Was it that the success of Nehemiah's work had given them a new hope and confidence, a new idea, indeed? They now saw the compact unity of Jerusalem established. Here was the seal and center of their separateness. Accepting this as an accomplished fact, the Jews were ready and even anxious to know that sacred law in which their distinction from other people and their consecration to Jehovah were set forth."

EXPLANATORY.

1. Ezra the scribe: This is the first mention of him in the book of Nehemiah. If this event took place but one week after the completion of the wall (see Introduction) it seems probable that he was in Jerusalem during the building. It is singular that he is never mentioned among the workers. Either he was among *the brethren* of the priest Eliashib (3:1) or else, being a student, he was of but little importance in such a practical enterprise as this. To bring that he return to this custom.

the book of the law, etc.: Evidently this had not been a regular and continual custom. It may have been the revival of one that had lapsed, but this is evidently one case where material prosperity led to a spiritual awakening. The completion of the wall insured the city's integrity, and they at once turned their attention to that which gave the city its spiritual importance, the law. In previous years Ezra had taught it; now they ask

that could hear with understanding, upon the first day of the seventh month. 3 And he read therein before the broad place that was before the water gate from the early morning until midday, in the presence of the men and the women, and of those that could understand; and the ears of all the people were *attentive* unto the book of the law. 4 And Ezra the

scribe stood upon a pulpit of wood, which they had made for the purpose; and beside him stood Mattithiah, and Shema, and Anaiah, and Uriah, and Hilkiah, and Maaseiah, on his right hand; and on his left hand, Pedaiah and Mishael, and Malchijah, and Hashum, and Hashbaddanah, Zechariah, and Meshullam. 5 And Ezra opened the book in the sight of all the

2. **Ezra the priest:** He was priest as well as scribe. He is called *priest* in the letter which Artaxerxes gave him (Ezra 7:11). His ancestral line is traced back to Aaron in Ezra 7:1-5. But he is more prominent as a scribe than as priest. **Brought the law:** This means the written law, the book which contained the law. In later times this was almost the universal signification of the word for the law. **The first day of the seventh month:** The seventh month was Tishri. The first day of each month was a sacred day because it was the day of the new moon. The first day of the seventh month was also the annual Feast of Tabernacles (Lev. 23:23-25). Since they did not know till they read in the Law that it was their duty to keep the Feast of Tabernacles (vs. 13. 13-15), it is not probable that they were familiar with this comparatively unimportant Feast of Trumpets. Hence it seems probable that the assembly on this day was to hear the law read, rather than that Ezra took advantage of their assembly on this day to read to them. According to the Babylonian and Persian method of reckoning the year, a method which we have observed Nehemiah followed (Neh. 1:1 and 2:1), this first day of the seventh month of the Jewish year was the first day of the first month of the Babylonian year, or the New Year's day. The vow taken on this occasion was, therefore, a sort of New Year's resolution.

3. **From early morning until midday:**

The Hebrew, as the margin states, is *From the light*. Hence the reading occupied not less than six hours. Ezra had others to assist him, however, and the reading was interrupted by exposition. **The men and the women,** etc.: Ezra had no other thought than that the law was for women as well as men, and for children, too, as many as could understand. No such limitation to men of the benefits of religion as is now the rule among Mohammedans was practiced by the Jews.

4. **A pulpit of wood:** This is the first mention of a pulpit. It marks a new era in religion. Teaching and preaching are from this time to have more prominence. Previously the knowledge of the law had not been so widely disseminated among the people as it was from this day forth. **Beside him stood,** etc.: Thirteen men are mentioned, six on his right hand and seven on his left. No word of explanation is offered as to who they were. Some scholars have conjectured Levites, others priests, and others prominent men who were supporters of Ezra's religious reforms. They probably assisted Ezra in the reading.

5. **Ezra opened the book:** That is, he unrolled it. Standing on the pulpit raised him above all the people. The people stood as a token of their respect for the law. Though this was the attitude assumed in the synagogue service when the law was read, it is scarcely to be thought that the people stood during the

people (for he was above all the people); and when he opened it, all the people stood up. **6** And Ezra blessed Jehovah, the great God; and all the people answered, Amen, Amen, with the lifting up of their hands, and they bowed their heads, and worshipped Jehovah with their faces to the ground. **7** Also Jeshua, and Bani, and Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Masseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan, Pelaiah, and the Levites, caused the people to understand the law; and the people stood in their place. **8** And they read in the book, in the law

of God, distinctly; and they gave the sense so that they understood the reading.

9 And Nehemiah, who was the governor, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto the people, This day is holy unto Jehovah your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. **10** Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto him for whom nothing is prepared; for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye grieved; for the joy of Jehovah is your

entire six hours of reading on this occasion. After Ezra had pronounced the blessing they probably resumed their seats.

6. The method of opening the service was impressive and reverential. Ezra blessed Jehovah, and the people responded with an audible *Amen*, with lifted hands, bowed heads and worshipping hearts.

7. Thirteen names are mentioned in this verse. Seven of them are mentioned elsewhere, four in 9:5 and seven in 10:9-14. These passages show that they were Levites, hence the copula *and* before the words, *the Levites*, should be taken in the sense of *even*. **Caused the people to understand:** They explained what the law meant and how it was to be observed. At a later time the scribes had to translate the law into Aramaic, but Hebrew was still the language of the people as is shown by the fact that the prophets Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi wrote in Hebrew. All of Nehemiah and most of Ezra are also in Hebrew. **The people stood, etc.:** The word "stood" is in italics, showing that the original text does not contain it. The original is literally "The people were in their places."

8. Distinctly: With clearness and precision. This refers to the distinctness and accuracy with which the reading was done. **They gave the sense:** Explained the meaning.

9. This day is holy, etc.: Because it was the new moon, the Feast of Trumpets, and now made doubly so by the reading of the Law. **All the people wept when they heard:** The effect of the reading of the law upon them was the same as that produced on Josiah (2 Kings 22:11). They, too, perceived in how many ways they had violated it. This shows that the people had been kept or had kept themselves in ignorance of the law.

10. Then he said: Whether the speaker was Ezra or Nehemiah is not clear. Since it was an interpretation of the law it is more probable that it was Ezra. **Eat the fat and drink the sweet:** Evidently this was a proverbial saying, which means that this was not a time to fast and give way to grief. **Send portions:** There were two customs among the Jews, either of which may have been the basis of Ezra's instruction. One was the sending of food to the poor as directed in Deut. 16:14. The other was the custom of interchang-

strength. 11 So the Levites stilled all the people, saying, Hold your peace, for the day is holy; neither be ye grieved. 12 And all the people went their way to eat,

and to drink, and to send portions, and to make great mirth, because they had understood the words that were declared unto them.

(American Standard Revised Version. Copyright, 1901, by Thomas Nelson & Sons.)

ing portions on feast days as described in Esther 9:19. **The joy of Jehovah:** of grief on holy days. Israel's joy in Jehovah is what is meant. 12. "The people sorrowed because it was based on confidence in the Lord's protection and goodness. They had not kept the law; they now rejoice because they are able to understand it."

11. From this verse it is evident that

COMMENTS.

Importance of the Event. The importance of the scene is very great. It marks out a departure from the previous religious methods. Prophets have preached before, but not from pulpits. They addressed the crowd that some other reason had brought together and spoke from any convenient elevation or from none at all. The reading of the law is not mentioned as a prominent feature of any religious assembly prior to this. In this reading of the law, with its interpretation, we have the foundation of the later synagogue service, in which reading and commenting upon the Scriptures was the principal element of the worship. In this, too, we find the beginning of a movement to place a knowledge of the law in every Jewish heart, a popularization of the law, in short. From this time forth it was not enough for a Jew to attend the feasts and offer such gifts as the priest directed him, but he himself must know the law and be responsible for its observance. Out of this grew the rabbinical schools of scriptural instruction, and so it is not inappropriate to speak of this as the first Bible school.

Value of Instruction. It should be noticed that no priest except Ezra is men-

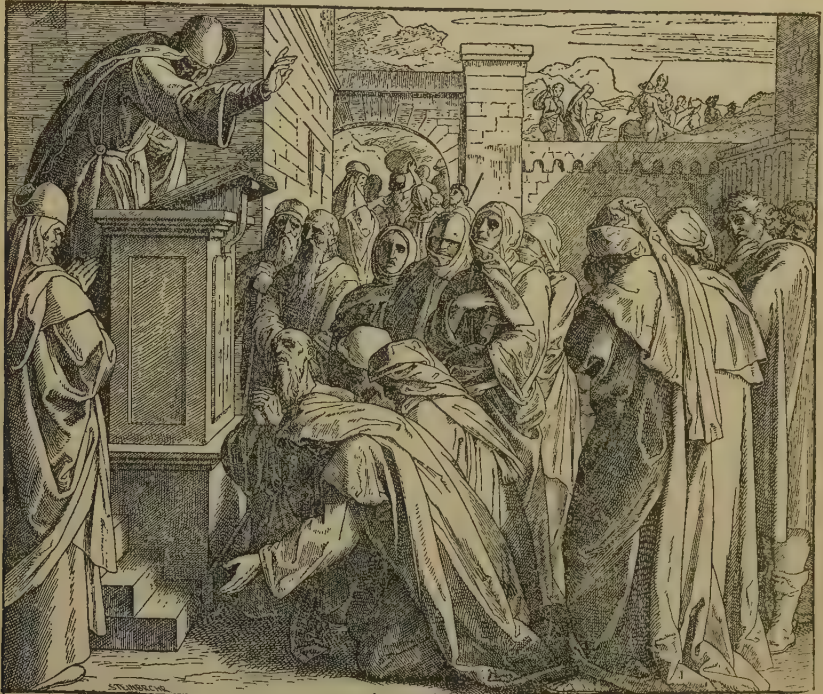
tioned, and he was more scribe than priest.

"Priests, all the world over, have made capital out of their exclusive knowledge of the ritual of religion. They have jealously guarded their secrets from the uninitiated multitude so as to make themselves necessary to anxious worshippers who dreaded to give offense to their gods or to fail in their sacrifices through ignorance of the prescribed methods. By committing the knowledge of the law to the people, Ezra protected the Jews against this abuse. Everything was to be above board, in broad daylight; and the degradation of ignorant worship was not to be encouraged, much as a corrupt priesthood in later times might desire it. An indirect consequence of this publication of the law with the careful instruction of the people in its contents, was that the element of knowledge took a more exalted position in religion. It is not the magical priest, it is the logical scribe, who really leads the people now. Ideas will mean more than in the old days of obscure ritual. There is an end to the 'dim religious light.' Henceforth *law instruction* is to be the most fundamental ground of faith." (Adeney.)

"All the People Wept." This was not what Ezra desired. He, supported by the Levites, did his best to suppress the tears, but, after all, these very tears must have been consolation and hope to Ezra. It told him that the reading of the law had made a deep impression upon their minds. He could regard

though the weeping might not be all that Ezra desired on a holy day, the tears of the people were a pledge of purer lives. "Godly sorrow worketh repentance."

The Cause and Fruitage of the Grief. "It is clear that their grief arose simply from their perception of their own



READING THE SCRIPTURES.

those tears as the promise of greater faithfulness. The reception of the law might have been far more depressing upon Ezra. It might have been listened to with utter indifference, or it might have been doubted or even rejected. But none of these feelings prevailed. The people had no doubt as to rightness of the law. It appealed to their own convictions and their consciences, and so,

miserable imperfections in contrast to the lofty requirements of the law and in view of its sombre threats of punishment for disobedience. The discovery of a new ideal of conduct above that with which we have hitherto been satisfied naturally provokes painful stings of conscience, which the old salve, compounded of the comfortable little notions we once cherished, will not neutralize. In the

new light of the higher truth we suddenly discover that the 'robe of righteousness' in which we have been parading is but as 'filthy rags.' Then our once vaunted attainments become despicable in our own eyes. The eminence on which we have been standing so proudly is seen to be a wretched mole-hill compared with the awful snow-peak from which the clouds have just disappeared. Can we ever climb that? Goodness now seems to be hopelessly unattainable; yet never before was it so desirable, because never before did it shine with so rare and fascinating a luster." (Adeney.)

The Wrongfulness of the Grief. Ezra and his companions evidently objected to the grief of the people in the first place because it marred the holy day. It was designed that such a day should be mirthful and joyous. So the Jews were accustomed to observe the festivals. The Psalms attest this fact. The Jewish religion was not mournful and sad. Ezra felt that it would be a pity to mar so joyous an occasion. But there is a deeper reason for checking the popular grief and that is because such feelings are unworthy of God. To approach him with fear and grief is to misunderstand God. Grief for sin is right, but there come times when even this is to be suppressed and "the joy of the Lord" should have full sway in our hearts.

"The Joy of the Lord." "This 'joy of the Lord,' then, is the joy that springs up in our hearts by means of our relation to God. It is a God-given gladness, and it is found in communion with God. Nevertheless the other 'joy of the Lord' is not to be left out of account when we

think of the gladness which comes to us from God, for the highest joy is possible to us just because it is first experienced by God. There could be no joy in communion with a morose divinity. The service of Moloch must have been a terror, a perfect agony to the most loyal devotees. The feelings of a worshiper will always be reflections from what he thinks he perceives in the countenance of his god. They will be gloomy if the god is a sombre personage and cheerful if he is a glad being. Now the revelation of God in the Bible is the unveiling with growing clearness of a countenance of unspeakable love and beauty and gladness. He is made known to us as 'the blessed God'—the happy God. Then the joy of his children is the overflow of his own deep gladness streaming down to them. This is the 'joy in the presence of angels' which, springing from the great heart of God, makes the happiness of returning penitents, so that they share in their Father's delight, as the prodigal shares in the home festivities when the fatted calf is killed. This same communication of gladness is seen in the life of our Lord, not only during those early sunny days in Galilee when his ministry opened under cloudless skies, but even amid the darkness of the last hours at Jerusalem, for in his final discourse Jesus prayed that his joy might be in his disciples in order that their joy might be full. A more generous perception of this truth would make religion like sunshine and music, like the blooming of spring flowers and the outbursts of woodland melody about the path of the Christian pilgrim." (Adeney.)

THE LESSON STORY.

Whether Ezra returned to Babylon or not is uncertain. But for twelve or fourteen years, between this lesson and the time of his radical reform in regard to divorcing the heathen wives, he seems to have disappeared from public notice.

It has been suggested that possibly the indignation inflicted upon the innocent women who were thrust back among their heathen relatives, brought down a storm of revenge upon the Jews, and that Ezra may have found it uncomforta-

ble to remain in Jeruasalem. It has also been thought that Ezra may have spent these years in retirement preparing himself for the business of teaching the law to which he is now called.

At any rate we find in this lesson a most interesting story of the beginning of a great reform in Bible study. Ezra was the first great leader. The remarkable and encouraging feature about it is that the people themselves gathered together and requested Ezra to teach them.

The temple had long been completed. The great enterprise of rebuilding the wall was happily finished. But temples and walls of defense can not make nor can they preserve a city. Something more vital than these is necessary. "Except Jehovah build the house, they labor in vain that build it: except Jehovah keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain." The character of the citizens must be developed in the fear of God. But with the temple and the wall reconstructed, and with such a governor as Nehemiah and such a teacher of the law as Ezra—and with the fear of God and the Hebrews resting upon the neighboring nations—the great day of *opportunity* had come.

The scribe and the synagogue—representing the system of education among the Jews for hundreds of years before the advent of our Lord—originated at the time of the captivity or soon after the return of the captives. There was nothing more essential to the religious life of the Jews than a knowledge of the law of Moses and a reverential acquaintance with the teaching of the prophets. The scribes copied, distributed and taught these writings to the people. The convenient places for instruction were the synagogues.

Then, too, it was a great advantage for the nation to have given up idolatries. It is remarkable that in this lesson we find the principles that obtain to-day in our great Bible schools. They were crudely applied, as they are to-day in

many places, but they are easily discoverable.

Ezra was the superintendent and chief platform teacher. He had thirteen assistants with him on the platform, six on one side and seven on the other. The one text book was the Bible, very different from our New Testament, of course, and very different also from the printed and well-bound volumes we use. But Ezra stood above the people upon a pulpit of wood, and the men mentioned stood with him, while he read out of the sacred roll of Scripture the law of Moses of which the people must have been very ignorant. Moreover, when he opened the book the people showed their reverence for it by standing. It is very much to be deplored that many who have been familiar with the Bible manifest in our day so little reverence for the holy word of God. If persons should be respectful and polite in society, how much more should they show reverence in the presence of the living word of God. The pupils in this Jerusalem school were many. It was, indeed, a big school. They could find no building convenient for the session of the school, and hence assembled in the broad open street to hear and learn. There were adults and children—all who were old enough to hear with understanding. It was not a well graded school. But we must remember that many an ungraded school has accomplished a vast amount of benefit. It was ideal in having all the people present. It was the proper thing to have the governor of the province—Nehemiah—the most distinguished citizen and great reformer, present in the school. He, Ezra and the Levites, said unto all the people: "This day is holy unto Jehovah your God; mourn not nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law." The teachers read and "gave the sense," so all could understand the teaching. That is an important part of teaching.

It is said that "all the people were

attentive unto the book." Good attention in the Bible school is greatly to be desired. "The ears of the people were to the book," more accurately expresses the original idea. The attention was not distracted from it by reports, collections or otherwise interrupted.

The best of all about that school was that the people took the lesson to heart. It produced conviction. The people saw and repented of their sins. Not only so, but they rejoiced in the divine forgiveness. There were tears of penitence and joy. They were reminded by their teachers that "the joy of Jehovah was their strength." They wanted to be strong in God, as we do also. The conviction of sin is a necessary product of a well-ordered Bible school. Nothing can effect that conviction so well as the proper presentation of Jesus to the hearts of the pupils. It is the goodness of God in him that above all other forces leads men to repentance. The Holy Spirit was to convict the world of sin because it believed not on Christ. Reverence, attention, conviction of sin are necessary qualities in the ideal Bible school.

It was a long session—from morning

until noon—but nobody became impatient or tired, or left, so far as we can ascertain.

It was perfectly natural that a great and splendid revival should follow this earnest study of the word of God. It was discovered that the law provided for a great thanksgiving festival, called the Feast of Tabernacles. The time for its celebration was near at hand. The people determined to celebrate it. And they did celebrate it for a whole week, giving attention every day to the reverent and prayerful study of the word of God. This was followed by a sacred covenant to which the princes, Levites and priests put their seal. The people promised to keep the law, to pay their tithes, for the support of the temple services, and to keep the Sabbath.

We are thankful for the growth of adult Bible classes and for the increasing attendance of the adult church members upon the sessions of the Bible school. "The whole church in the Bible school, and as many more," is a good motto, and especially when added to the other: "The whole Bible school in the church."

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. What great reform did Nehemiah succeed in inaugurating with reference to the Jews who as money lenders oppressed their brethren? Neh. 5:1-12.

2. How did Sanballat and Geshem seek to call Nehemiah from his work? Neh. 6:2.

3. What reply did Nehemiah return unto them? Neh. 6:3.

4. Tell about the open letter of San-

ballat, and what its design? Neh. 6:5-7.

5. What scheme had Sanballat hired Shemaiah to carry out, and why? Neh. 6:10-13.

6. Why did all the neighboring nations fear when they heard the walls were finished? 6:16.

7. Summarize the principal benefits to the Jews wrought through Nehemiah.

QUESTIONS ON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. When all the people had assembled before the water gate what did they say to Ezra the scribe? Neh. 8:1.

2. What did Ezra bring before them, when, and who were present? Neh. 8:2.

3. What did Ezra read, to whom, and for how long a time? Neh. 8:3.

4. What is said about the attention of all the people? Neh. 8:3.

5. How many stood up with Ezra—how many on the right and left? Neh. 8:4.

6. When Ezra opened the book, or roll, all the people did what? Neh. 8:5.

7. When Ezra blessed Jehovah, what did all the people answer? Neh. 8:6.

8. How many teachers did Ezra have in his Bible school that day beside the Levites? Neh. 8:7.

9. What was the object of that day's teaching? Neh. 8:7.

10. What two important facts are mentioned in connection with the reading? Neh. 8:8.

11. What distinguished official was present on that occasion? Neh. 8:9.

12. What effect upon the people did the reading of the law produce? Neh. 8:9.

13. What did Nehemiah, Ezra and the Levites say to the people? Neh. 8:9.

14. What was said about sending "por-

tions," about the day and about the joy of the Lord? Neh. 8:10.

15. Why do you suppose the people wept at the reading of the law?

16. If people understand the Scriptures and obey the Lord, what effect will the words of the Lord produce upon them? Neh. 8:12.

17. Who came together on the following day, and for what purpose? Neh. 8:13.

18. What commandment did they find written in the law about a feast? Neh. 8:14.

19. What did the people do in obedience to this commandment? Neh. 8:16, 17.

20. What attention did they give daily to the word of God? Neh. 8:18.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. This is one of the most practical of lessons for ourselves and our times. The neglect of the word of God is always a serious and dangerous neglect. If to neglect the law of Moses was a serious blunder, "how shall we escape if we neglect so great salvation?" (Heb. 2:30.) If the man was blessed whose delight was in the law of the Lord (Psa. 1:2), how much more blessed is he whose delight is in the Lord himself, the fulfillment of the law and prophets? If Jesus could say of himself—as well as of others—"Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God," how earnestly men should seek to live by that word! That means that one's hourly life should be fashioned by the counsels of the word and every step taken in its light. "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly," is a most inspiring motto. The Scriptures testify of Christ, and men must come to him that they may have life. Happy is he man who remembers and cherishes the commands and the precious promises of the Scriptures. They will spring forth in his darkness as stars in the night. They will be a lamp unto his feet and a light unto his pathway. To neglect the Scrip-

tures is to neglect the words of life, of joy and peace.

2. Provision was made under the apostles for teaching the word to the whole Church of God. Elders were to be apt to teach. Paul told Timothy that he was to teach the things to others which he had learned, and that they, too, were to teach them faithfully to others. Thus a line of faithful teachers of the gospel was to be preserved. The work of teaching in the churches has been greatly neglected. The Sunday-school should be for the whole church, and, as far as possible, for the whole community. The public school, the daily newspapers, good books and magazines will never take the place of the Scriptures. To let other reading, business, pleasures—of one kind or another—crowd out the study of the Bible is to let weeds crowd out the wheat or corn. The parable of the Sower represents the value of the word of God and the attitude of different classes to its reception. The proper way to treat the word of God is to receive it into one's honest and good heart as good soil, prepared, receives the pure and precious seed into its bosom. Better than wall or temple to a city is the word of God.

MALACHI REBUKING AND ENCOURAGING JUDAH.

Malachi 3:1-4:3.

GOLDEN TEXT—Return unto me and I will return unto you, saith Jehovah of hosts. Mal. 3:7.

Memory Verses—3: 16, 17. **Suggested Readings**—Malachi and Nehemiah 13.
Time—428 B. C. **Persons**—Malachi and the Jews. **Place**—Probably Jerusalem.

DAILY READINGS.

Dec. 18.....M—Mal. 3:1-4:3—Malachi Rebuking and Encouraging Judah.
 Dec. 19.... T—Mal. 1:1-14—The Lord's Love—Israel's Ingratitude.
 Dec. 20.... W—Mal. 2:1-17—Wearying the Lord with Words.
 Dec. 21.... T—Neh. 13:1-31—The Cleansing of Israel.
 Dec. 22.... F—Isaiah 43:14-28—Israel Weary of the Lord.
 Dec. 23.... S—Matt. 7:13-27—"By Their Fruits ye Shall Know Them."
 Dec. 24.....S—James 1:12-27—"Be ye Doers of the Word, and not Hearers only."

THE PROPHET AND HIS BOOK.

It is doubtful whether we know the name of the prophet who is the author of the last book of the Old Testament. The word Malachi means *my messenger*. It must be translated in this way, and not as a proper name in 3:1, and it may have this meaning in 1:1. The Jewish Targum says that Ezra was the author of the book. This is not likely, but it has the tendency of throwing doubt upon the conclusion that Malachi is a proper name. The book is likewise undated, but it is not at all difficult to determine its approximate date. It was after the captivity, for the Edomites are conquered (1:1, 2), and this was accomplished by the Nabateans during the captivity. The word for governor in 1:8 is a Persian word, so this was in the Persian period. Other considerations point unmistakably to the same conclusion. The temple service has been renewed, so it was not early in the Persian period. The people have grown careless and worldly. The priests are corrupt and partial in their administration of the

law. Foreign marriages are being contracted and the people are careless about the payment of the tithes. These considerations make it plain that the book falls somewhere within the time when Ezra and Nehemiah were agitating for reforms of these very evils. It is not possible to date the book more exactly than this.

The purpose of the book is quite evident. "The book of 'Malachi' is an argument with the prophet's contemporaries, not only with the wicked among them who, in forgetfulness of what Jehovah is, corrupt the ritual, fail to give the temple its dues, abuse justice, marry foreign wives, divorce their own, and commit various other sins, but also, with the pious, who, equally forgetful of God's character, are driven by the arrogance of the wicked to ask whether he loves Israel, whether he is a God of justice, and to murmur that it is vain to serve him. To these two classes of his contemporaries the prophet has the following answer: God does love Israel. He

7 From the days of your fathers ye have turned aside from mine ordinances, and have not kept them. Return unto me,

and I will return unto you, saith Jehovah of hosts. But ye say, Wherein shall we return? 8 Will a man rob God? yet ye

is worshiped everywhere among the heathen. He is the Father of all Israel. He will bless his people when they put away all abuses from their midst and pay their religious dues, and his day of judgment is coming, when the good

shall be separated from the wicked. But before it comes, Elijah the prophet will be sent to attempt the conversion of the wicked, or at least to call the nation to decide for Jehovah." (G. A. Smith.)

LESSON INTRODUCTION.

The people of Malachi's time are sullen and contented with their sinfulness. They are not willing to make an effort for reform. They believe that sin is successful. They say, "Every one that doeth evil is good in the eyes of Jehovah, and he delighteth in them" (2:17). The prophet's answer to this is that the Lord himself shall come and before him shall come his messenger, who shall prepare his way. The purpose of the divine visitation is to sit in searching judgment. "Who can abide the day of

his coming?" The first thing which he shall accomplish is to be the cleansing of the sons of Levi, in order that the offerings may be offered in righteousness. After this he will purify the people from all impurity and drive from them all wickedness and superstition. The sins which are staining the lives of the people are partly social impurity and oppression, and partly certain relics of idolatry. The paragraph ends with an affirmation of the unchanging nature of God and the consequent certainty of their punishment.

EXPLANATORY.

7. From the days of your fathers: The reference is to the generation that came out of Egypt. Jeremiah is more explicit. He says: "Since the day that your fathers came forth out of the land of Egypt," etc. (Jer. 7:25). **Ye have turned aside from mine ordinances:** The previous verse affirms the unchanging character of God in respect to goodness. This verse affirms the unchanging character of the Jews in respect to evil. From the beginning of their national existence they had not kept God's ordinances. **Return unto me, etc.:** This sets forth the human and the divine part. Man is free and has the power to turn. God's grace will meet him half of the way, Cf. Zech. 1:3. **Where-**

in shall we return? This question was not asked sincerely to find how the return might be accomplished, but in a complaining and Pharisaic spirit. It amounts to a denial of their sinfulness, and hence of the necessity of returning.

8. Will a man rob God? God is here the questioner. The word translated rob, means rather *defraud* or *cheat*. The question is one of surprise of wonder. Will man, who has received so much from God, return evil for his kindness by defrauding him? This is followed by the assertion, *ye rob me*. **Wherein have we robbed thee?** The consciences of the prophet's hearers are steeled and their spirits sullen. To God's charge,

rob me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed thee? In tithes and offerings. 9 Ye are cursed with the curse; for ye rob me, even this whole nation. 10 Bring ye the whole tithe into the store-house, that there may be food in my house, and prove me now herewith, saith Jehovah of hosts, if I will not open you the windows of heaven, and pour you out a blessing, that there shall not be room enough to receive it. 11 And I will rebuke the devourer

for your sakes, and he shall not destroy the fruits of your ground; neither shall your vine cast its fruit before the time in the field, saith Jehovah of hosts. 12 And all nations shall call you happy; for ye shall be a delightsome land, saith Jehovah of hosts.

13. Your words have been stout against me, saith Jehovah. Yet ye say, What have we spoken against thee? 14 Ye have said, It is vain to serve God; and what profit is

they ask, "In what?" which is equivalent to a denial that they had defrauded God. In tithes and offerings: The tithes were the tenth part of their increase, and the offerings were the part of each sacrifice which was the priests' or the Levites' due. Cf. Neh. 12:44.

9. Ye are cursed with the curse: Note that it is not a curse but the curse. In 2:2 Malachi says, "I will send the curse upon you." The curse referred to is that pronounced against Israel for failure to keep the law (Deut. 28:15-20). For ye rob me: This specifies the respect in which the law has been violated. They failed to pay their tithes and offerings.

10. Bring ye the whole tithe, etc.: The emphasis is upon the whole, not a part of it. In keeping back a part they were acting the part of Ananias. Into the storehouse: These were prepared originally by Hezekiah (2 Chron. 31:11), and were renewed by Nehemiah (Neh. 10:38, 13:12). That there may be food in my house: Barely food, and not a superfluity, as Pusey says. Prove me now herewith: That is by bringing the whole tithes into the storehouse. Put God to the proof and learn that his gifts exceed all human gifts. There shall not be room enough: That is, man shall not have capacity to receive it. "God's gifts are limited only by our capacity to receive."

11. I will rebuke: God will rebuke and so restrain the destroyer. In 2:3

God threatens that he will rebuke their seed, that is, prevent it from growing. The destroyer: Probably locusts. See Joel 1:4. The Israelites were taught to believe that such scourges were punishments from the hand of God. Here they are promised that their return to God shall produce their removal and restore fruitfulness to field and vine. Cast its fruit before the time: Neither blight, nor frost, nor hail should cause the fruit to fall prematurely. They were taught to regard the blossoms or the unripe fruit strewing the ground as a token of God's displeasure.

12. All nations shall call you happy: Because their land shall be prosperous and no famine shall bring pain and death to them. This is clearly stated in the second clause. They were to be happy, because they were to possess a delightful land.

13. This verse introduces a new subject. Some were murmuring against God because temporal prosperity had not come to them. Their complaint is set forth in vs. 12-15. Stout against me: They had indulged in criticisms of God. What have we spoken against thee? When they had complained and found fault they were not conscious that they were criticising God. They were accustomed to call it by a more pleasant name.

14. It is vain to serve God: This was the harsh word which they spoke against him. Service of God had not improved

it that we have kept his charge, and that we have walked mournfully before Jehovah of hosts? 15 and now we call the proud happy; yea, they that work wickedness are built up; yea, they tempt God and escape.

16 Then they that fear Jehovah spake one with another; and Jehovah hearkened, and heard, and a book of remem-

brance was written before him, for them that feared Jehovah, and that thought upon his name. 17 And they shall be mine, saith Jehovah of hosts, *even* mine own possession, in the day that I make; and I will spare them, as a man spareth his own son that serveth him. 18 Then shall ye return and discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God and him that serveth him not.

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their condition. **We have walked mournfully before Jehovah:** They had mourned over their country's affliction. Now they say that this had been useless.

15. **We call the proud happy:** By the proud they mean the wicked. They had reached the state of mind which regards righteousness as a handicap and wickedness as a means of prosperity. This was the attitude of mind reached by the author of the 73rd Psalm. **They that work wickedness are built up:** That is, they prosper and live happy lives. **They tempt God:** They put God to the proof, but not with repentance, as they are told in v. 10.

16. This verse states the result of the prophet's preaching. **Those that feared Jehovah spake with one another:** They spoke for God and strengthened one an-

other's faith. Two results followed. God took note of this and wrote their names in a book of remembrance.

17. This verse continues the thought of v. 16. Not only shall their names be written in the book, but God shall claim them as his own possession, and in the great and terrible day of judgment he will spare them.

18. **Then shall ye return and discern:** This is equivalent to "Then shall ye again discern," etc. The difference between the wicked and the righteous may be clearly perceived in the day of God's judgment. Here Malachi turns from the former test of the righteous, namely, material prosperity, and, like the author of the 73rd Psalm, sees the final distinction brought out in the day of judgment only.

COMMENTS.

The Age and Its Lost Hopes. The age of Ezra, of Nehemiah and the years which followed was a period of broken hopes, desponding spirits and decay. We know but little of it. We are tempted to think that the two great leaders achieved more than they really did. They but cast the seed into the soil; it was left for another generation to approach nearer their ideals. Malachi shows us the actual condition of the people. The completion of the temple did not pro-

duce the great benefits which the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah led them to hope. Their land did not prosper. Fresh migrations did not come from Babylon. The small population was harassed by their hostile enemies. They got no help from Persian rulers. They were left alone, and it seemed to them that they were forsaken by God. The consequent despondency and despair was the temper of mind against which the prophet Malachi preached.

Their Manner of Life. The result of such a state of mind was quickly manifest in their lives. They came back from exile with high hopes and with a sense of their importance in the purposes of God. They had been disciplined by the exile; now they expected happier days. Instead, however, like other people, they had had crop seasons and the malicious opposition of enemies. Their faith was shaken and they began to doubt God's love and his righteousness. They neglected their temple dues, and when they did pay them, lightened the burden as much as possible by offering polluted bread and blemished beasts (1:7-13), which, Malachi tells them, they would not dare to offer the governor (1:8). The priests, too, shared in the general corruption. They became careless about the service and gross immorality was beginning to mar the lives of the entire nation. Had such a state continued long the nation, with its high hopes and destiny, would have been submerged.

Malachi's Remedies. What were the points of his preaching by which Malachi opposed this unbelief and immorality, and sought to turn the tide Godward again? They were the same great principles proclaimed by his predecessors, the prophets. He proclaimed "the everlasting love of Jehovah for Israel, the Fatherhood of Jehovah and his holiness, his ancient ideals for priesthood and people, the need of repentance proved by deeds, the consequent promise of prosperity, the day of the Lord, and judgment between the evil and the righteous."

He lays special emphasis upon the last two. The great tribulation is no longer the exile. That is past. But it is to be a *great and terrible day of Jehovah*. It is to produce upon the people the same effect which the fire of the smelter produces on the ore. Before

this time, however, God will manifest his love by giving his people an opportunity to repent. He will send to them Elijah, who will prepare their hearts for this terrible time of trial. Christ identified this *great and terrible day* with the final judgment and regarded the preaching of John the Baptist as the fulfillment of the promise that Elijah should come (Matt. 11:14).

Two Great Sins. Our lesson emphasizes two sins which they committed. The first was neglect of the service, and especially the neglect of that part which cost them something. They did not give the priests their dues. Malachi recognized that the laborer is worthy of his hire. The priests were identified with God. Neglect of them meant neglect of God. As Jerome states it, "Because the people did not render tithes and first-fruits to the Levites, the Lord said, that he himself suffered fraud, whose ministers, constrained by hunger and penury, deserted the temple. For, if he is visited by others in prison, and sick is received and cared for, and hungry and athirst receives food and drink, why should he not receive tithes in his ministers, and, if they are not given, be himself deprived of his portion?"

The other sin was worse even than this. It was the sin of doubting God. It is a new sin in Israel's history. Individuals may have committed it, but this is the first time that the entire nation seems to have been poisoned by skepticism. The writer quoted above describes their condition: "For the people who returned from Babylon seemed to have a knowledge of God, and to observe the law, and to understand their sin, and to offer sacrifices for sin; to pay tithes, to observe the Sabbath and the rest commanded in the law of God, and seeing all the nations around them abounding in all things, and that they themselves were in penury, hunger and misery, were scandalized and said, 'what does it benefit me, that I wor-

ship the one true God, abominate idols, and, pricked with the consciousness of sin, walk mournfully before God!' A topic which is pursued more largely in the 73rd Psalm.' But the Psalmist in this Psalm, which is a prayer to God, relates what his temptations were and how he obtained deliverance from them. These people, however, yield to the same

temptation and are described in Malachi as speaking them against God. They are already curtailing their worship as a consequence, and are claiming that this emasculated service is the full observance of God's ordinances. Malachi endeavors to bring them to the same state of mind which the Psalmist reached, and to consider the latter end of those who despise God.

THE LESSON STORY.

It matters little who Malachi was, even as it did not matter who John the Baptist was, provided only the work of each should be faithfully performed. Those long catalogues of names in certain parts of the Bible, with whatever information may be afforded as to their ancestry, are not very interesting to persons now living. They may become extremely valuable in heaven when, under the tuition of competent teachers, we shall review their valorous deeds of obedience and love to God. But, after all, the names, deeds and words of prophets, priests and kings, leaders and heroes of Bible history, whether in the Old or New Testament, furnish only a setting for the one supreme Person who is made to us, "Wisdom, Righteousness, Sanctification and Redemption."

Four hundred years is a long period; and yet, from the last words of Malachi to the first words of the Gospel, fully four centuries rolled out of the future into the past. God is in no hurry. Men were not prepared for John's coming until he came. The Chosen People were not ready for Jesus until John had preached repentance and had baptized the multitudes, telling them to believe on Him who was soon to appear. In the light of the Old Testament history it would seem that men were never ready for God. And, in the light of the New, Jesus came to his own people and they received him not.

This prophecy begins with the words, "The burden of the word of the Lord." No true prophet ever arose except with the burden of the Lord upon his heart. We may learn from this book of Malachi that sins were continually gaining possession of the hearts of Judah. People were robbing God in withholding from him their offerings. They were even offering imperfect and basely unworthy gifts upon his altar. They would weep, but not forsake their sins. They were continually bringing affliction upon themselves by their sins. Malachi was a courageous, practical and plain-speaking prophet.

Dr. Hunter describes Malachi's style thus: "Socrates, who about this time was making war on the Sophists of Athens, displays no greater mastery of dialectics than Malachi. He starts his questions, puts an answer in the mouth of an imaginary opponent, then overwhelms him with persiflage, cutting irony, crushing rebuke. Nothing could be more spirited than his onset; it is the rapid sword-play of a skilled fencer; bout follows bout, swift thrust and parry of question and answer, and at last, the final stroke dealt with deadly effect." The Golden Age of the Bible, from the opening words of Genesis to the closing chapter of Revelation, descriptive of the New Jerusalem, is in the future. Isaiah tells of the Wonderful, Counsellor, the Mighty God, the Father of the everlasting age

and the Prince of Peace. Daniel prophesies of the Stone cut out of the mountain without hands breaking the kingdoms of the world into fragments and grinding them to powder. Malachi tells of Jesus' forerunner, and of him in whom the people should delight, and who should suddenly come to his temple. He was to sit "as a refiner of silver" and be to the people, defiled, as "fullers' soap." In this book the Lord calls his people to return unto him. They ask how they shall return, and he quickly tells them. They must return in making their proper tithes and offerings. It is not that God cares for or is enriched by offerings from his people, but that they themselves

are enriched through their offerings that cost them sacrifice or self-denial.

Offerings, not for fire upon an altar, to be consumed; but offerings for the same purpose as that for which Jesus offered himself—for the salvation of the world—are required of the disciples of Jesus to-day. Our vision is far greater than was that of the Jews in Jerusalem to whom the prophet appealed. Our message is a thousand times more important. Our opportunity is infinitely superior to the opportunity which they enjoyed. Let not the erring Jews of the centuries long before Jesus was born in Bethlehem rise up in judgment and condemn us for our sins greater than theirs.

PRELIMINARY QUESTIONS.

1. Concerning what especially did our last lesson treat?

2. What did the assembled people in Jerusalem ask of Ezra?

3. What did we find shadowed forth with reference to the modern Bible teaching?

4. Who was superintendent? Who were on the platform with Ezra? What distinguished person was present and participated? What was the text book? How long was the session? How did the people show their reverence for the Bible? What did all the people say when Ezra blessed Jehovah? Who were the pupils in that Bible school? How did the

teachers cause the pupils to understand?

(Ezra 8:8). What was said about *attention* in that school? How many teachers—in addition to the Levites—are mentioned? (Ezra 8:7.) What two strong effects did the study of the Scriptures have upon the pupils? (Ezra 8:9-12.) What very practical effect did it have upon the pupils with respect to others? (Ezra 8:10-12.) What did this school do on the following day? (Ezra 8:13.) What did they find in the book on the second day? (8:14.) To what great revival did this Bible school lead the people? (Ezra 8:14-18.) What covenant did they make? (Neh. 9:38—10:39.)

QUESTIONS UPON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. How did Malachi begin his message to Israel? Mal. 1:2.

2. In what relationship did the Lord present himself to Israel. Mal. 1:6.

3. What were some of the evils into which the people had fallen? Mal. 1:6-8.

4. What at this time did Jehovah promise as to his glory? Mal. 1:11.

5. What did the prophet say should fall upon Israel if disobedient? Mal. 1:14—2:2.

6. What reproof did he administer es-

pecially to the priests? Mal. 2:1, 1-9.

7. What further sin did Israel commit which the prophet reproved? Mal. 2:13.

8. What did the Lord teach concerning the treatment which husbands should render to their wives? Mal. 2:14-16.

9. Concerning what great coming events did Malachi prophesy? Mal. 3:1-6.

10. Who was that messenger? What was his character and what was his mission? Mal. 3:1-2.

11. What promise was made with reference to the offering in that day? 3:4.

12. The Lord was to witness against what sinners at that time? Mal. 3:5.

13. Wherein had Israel wandered and how should the people return? Mal. 3:7-10.

14. What practical lesson is there for us in this reproof? Mal. 3:8-12.

15. What evil words had Judah spoken against God? Mal. 3:13-15.

16. What happy, glorious time was

foretold for God's children? Mal. 3:16-18.

17. What should happen to the proud and wicked, and what to them who should fear the Lord? Mal. 4:1-3.

18. What in conclusion did Malachi tell the Jews to remember and what did he promise from Jehovah? Mal. 4:4-6.

19. The Old Testament closes with the promise of whose coming, and for what? Mal. 4:5.

20. What should John the Baptist do, and why was he to be sent? Mal. 4:6, 3:1.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. The Old Testament closes with a prophecy of the coming of John the Baptist and the New begins with the story of his coming. In the Old Testament the stream of God's mercy flows among rugged rocks and under tangled wildwood; but in the New Testament it comes out into the sunlight and glides through the clear-cut channel of the personal Christ. One is the prophecy of Jesus and the other is the glorious fulfillment. Religion is a personal thing. It is the Christ. Its object is to make the sinner Christ-like. Many years elapsed between the close of Malachi and the opening words of the Gospel, but the story is a connected one. The hand of Malachi clasped the hand of John, the humble forerunner of Christ. Malachi spoke the word of introduction.

2. Sin! sin! sin! Its horribleness and its poverty-working power are set forth in the whole history of God's favored

people. God's hatred of iniquity is revealed on every page of the Old book. But side by side with sin lies the sacrifice, the offering, pointing to the Lamb of God, who, as John declared, "taketh away the sin of the world." His name was called Jesus, because he should save his people from their sins. There can be no right appreciation of Christ except through a proper conception of the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Or, there can be no just estimate of sin except as seen through the character, mission and sacrifice of Jesus our Lord. Sin on the one hand, and Christ the Saviour on the other—this is the gospel of salvation. If he be not our great Saviour he is nothing to us. If we be not cleansed and raised up from sin through his grace our hope is vain and heaven will not receive us. It is into death we are baptized and into the spiritual resurrection we are raised by his gracious power.

JESUS BORN IN BETHLEHEM. .

Christmas Lesson. Matt. 2:1-12.

GOLDEN TEXT—Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. Luke 2:11.

Memory Verses—11, 12. **Time**—4 B. C. **Persons**—Jesus, Herod, Magi, chief priests, scribes and Mary. **Places**—Jerusalem and Bethlehem.

DAILY READINGS.

Dec. 18.... M—Isaiah 9:6, 7; 11:1-10—The Messiah and his Age.

Dec. 19.... T—Micah 5:2-9—The Ruler from Bethlehem.

Dec. 20.... W—Luke 3:1-17—The Lord's Coming Heralded.

Dec. 21.... T—Luke 1:26-56—The Annunciation.

Dec. 22.... F—Matt. 1:18-24—Warning to Joseph.

Dec. 23.... S—Luke 2:1-20—The Announcement to Shepherds.

Dec. 24.... S—Luke 2:21-40—Circumcision and Purification.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND.

Christ came, as the apostle says, in "the fullness of time." The world was ripe for his coming. Events during the two or three centuries prior to his birth had been preparing mankind for him. The mental and moral state of the world was such that the need of just such a one as he claimed to be was more keenly felt than at any time previous or since. In the first place, at this exact period in the world's history the Greek tongue came nearer to being a universal speech than at any other time, and no other language has ever attained to such widespread usage. In almost any part of the world a group of men could be assembled which could converse in the Greek tongue. Wherever the conquest of Alexander had extended the Greek language was understood. One of the languages which Pilate used in writing the inscription for Jesus' cross was Greek. When Paul wrote to the Roman church he used

Greek. This was a great help to the missionaries of the cross. On arrival at any place they were ready to begin preaching without the necessity of learning the language.

The Roman Empire of this period was the nearest approach to a stable, well organized, universal empire that has ever been upon this globe. The Roman genius for law and order had wrought out of the diverse races of three continents one compact and orderly unit. The Roman roads, commerce, and legal protection were by-products of this government. These institutions enabled one of the early Christian preachers to travel from one limit of civilization to the other without having to pass the boundary which divided one nation from another. Everywhere he would have good roads, he would find the tide of commerce flowing beside him, and he would be able to appeal to lawfully constituted courts for protection.

Philosophy had contributed its part, too, in preparing the world for Christ. All the philosophical parties of that day were united in this, that they taught the wisdom and the advantage of a moral life. They had given to the world a lofty ideal, but they had signally failed in being able to offer the motive which would lead men to live it. The world had the ideal; what was needed was the stimulus and the motive. Christ gave these.

The old religions were dying. Men of every faith were looking anxiously for a new and more perfect religion. Religiously, the world at that time was divided into three strata. The lower stratum contained the multitude, which was still attached to the old faith and which had not commenced to doubt. The upper stratum contained a number who had given way to doubt and had drifted into atheism and agnosticism. Neither class was readily susceptible to the gospel message. But between these two classes was the great majority of the race who were beginning to distrust the old religions, were growing restless, but were still hungering and thirsting for the strength and comfort which come from faith. This was the class that heard the message of the cross with gladness. Had Christ come a century earlier than he did, this multitude would have been found still trusting in their old gods and not so easily reached. Had

he delayed his coming till a century later, the majority of them would, by that time, have been swallowed up in the rising tide of infidelity.

The Jews, too, had contributed their part in preparing the world for Christ. Their punctilious observance of the Levitical distinction between things clean and unclean had given them a conception of purity. Jesus seized upon this and, by transferring it from the external to the heart (Mark 7) he was able to build upon a foundation which was already securely laid. Their synagogues, too, in every part of the world supplied the apostles on every seventh day with a congregation that could comprehend the significance of their message, and whose hearts had, for past generations, been prepared to hear just such a message as was given them. The Jewish belief in Monotheism, and in high morality had attracted to their synagogue worship a number of the noblest spirits from the Gentiles. These, too, were won in large numbers by the early preachers. The observing student can not fail to see in all of these diverse forces and agencies, centering in the one time, certain proof that the hand of God had shaped the world for the coming of his anointed One. He came to his own and his own received him not, but no other time in the world's history would, in all probability, have given to him so warm a welcome.

EXPLANATORY.

1. **Now:** There is no break between the first and second chapters. The narrative goes right on. The previous sentence ends with the word Jesus and this one relates the fact of his birth in Bethlehem. **Bethlehem:** This is a village about five miles south of Jerusalem and lying to the east of the Hebron road. The present village contains something more than 500 houses. It is

built on the summit and sides of a narrow ridge which extends eastward at right angles from the main Judean range. It is called "Bethlehem of Judea," not because there was another Bethlehem from which it must be distinguished, but because it is so named in the prophecy quoted below. **In the days of Herod the king:** In this way the author of the gospel dates the birth of Jesus. Herod

1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa in the days of Herod the king, behold Wise-men from the east came to

Jerusalem, saying, 2 Where is he that is born king of the Jews? for we saw his star in the east, and are come to worship

reigned from 40 to 4 B. C. Circumstances show that this event took place near the close of his reign. He is sometimes called Herod the Great. He was the greatest of the Herods, of whom the New Testament mentions seven, though he is deserving of the title *great* for no other reason. Matthew gives him the simple title *the king*. This was sufficient to distinguish him from the other Herods to the mind of his readers, for the other Herod that bore the title of king was usually known by another name, Agrippa. This Herod had no other name, and his sons and successors who reigned during the time of Christ's ministry were tetrarchs and not kings. **Wise men:** The margin explains that the Greek word translated *wise men* is *magi*. This is the word whence comes our magician. To us this word has a suggestion of evil and superstitious power, but this was not its sole meaning to the ancients. It is a Persian word, and meant *priest*. Jeremiah (39:3) speaks of an officer of the Chaldeans by the title Rag-Mag, that is, chief of the magi. The magi are often mentioned in Daniel (2:1-13; 5:1-9). They are the learned men of the kingdom, the ones who are called upon to undertake any difficult task or hold the important offices. In accord with ancient custom, they practiced divination, hence our term magician. **From the east:** By this term is meant that region stretching from the Jordan eastward. Somewhere from this undefined region these men came. It is impossible to be more exact. This region included Arabia, Persia, Chaldea, Parthia, etc. **To Jerusalem:** It seems that they knew nothing more about this person that they sought than that he was born king of the Jews.

Hence, in seeking him, they come to the capital of the country, and, on arrival there, they made inquiry at the palace.

2. **Where is he that is born king of the Jews?** How did they come to know that a king was born, or was to be born, king of the Jews? They say that they saw his star. How did they know that it was *His* star? How did they obtain the knowledge that this star heralded the coming of a Jewish king? These questions can not be answered without supposing a revelation to them. That there was an expectation of the coming of a great leader out of the East is well attested, but knowledge of this tradition would not lead these wise men to conclude that he was to come from the *Jewish people*. **We saw his star:** An extensive literature has been written on this subject. Every conceivable theory to give a natural explanation of it has been suggested, such as a conjunction of planets, a star which now appeared for the first time, a comet, a meteor, etc. Against each of these, except the last—which is clearly untenable, for no meteor ever appeared twice—the fatal objection can be urged that it could not have “stood over where the young child was” (v. 9). This expression shows that it must have been some low-hanging, luminous body, the appearance of which led them to call it a star. **In the east:** This may mean either that they, while in the east, saw it, or that they saw it rising in the east. The way in which the phrase is used in v. 9 favors the former meaning. **To worship him:** The honor which was paid to a king is meant, and not the worship paid to God. A better translation would be *to do homage*.

him. 3 And when Herod the king heard it, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And gathering together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ should be born. 5 And they said unto him, in Bethlehem of Judea; for thus it is written through the prophet,

6 And thou Bethlehem, land of Judah, Art in no wise least among the princes of Judah;

For out of thee shall come forth a governor,

Who shall be shepherd of my people Israel.

7 Then Herod privily called the Wise-men, and learned of them exactly what time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search out exactly concerning the young child; and when ye have found *him*, bring me word, that I also may come and worship him. 9 And they, having heard the king, went their way; and lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before

3. **He was troubled:** He was disturbed in mind at the prospect of a rival. His friends would share this feeling, while the bulk of the people would be troubled at the thought of the new cruelties he would inflict.

4. **Chief priests and scribes:** By the chief priests are meant the present high priest, those who had held that office and those priests who belonged to the families from which the high priest might be selected. The scribes meant the teachers of the law. These two classes, with the elders, constituted the Sanhedrin, but we are probably, in this case, to understand a general assembly of those who knew the law. **The Christ:** They asked for the king of the Jews; he in turn asked for the Christ, for he knew the Jewish belief well enough to know that the Christ was to be the king of the Jews.

5. **It is written:** This was the regular Jewish method of quoting Scripture. The original is found in Micah 5:2. The quotation in this case is not exact, but the thought is accurately reproduced. The very body which afterwards condemned him now testify that his birth in Bethlehem fulfilled prophecy.

6. **Princes of Judah:** Micah says *thousands*. Each of the twelve tribes of Israel was divided into families and

the heads of these families were princes. The prince here stands for the head of the family and his community. Bethlehem was one of these communities. **Be shepherd:** Micah has the more general expression *rule*.

7. **Privily:** The Jewish teachers that he had consulted might seek to protect the child by notifying its parents, should he have allowed his action to become known. They would be interested in the knowledge that the Messiah was born. **What time the star appeared:** This was to determine the age of the child. He has learned the place of its birth, now he seeks to learn its age. His next step will be to locate the child itself. He purposes to use the magi to this end.

8. **To Bethlehem:** They have lost sight of the star and are dependent upon Herod for directions. **That I also may come, etc.:** His purpose was to slay the child. This action shows how cunningly Herod could plot, and that he was a man who would leave no stone unturned.

9. **Having heard the king:** They seem not to have suspected what Herod's real motives were, and so complied with his directions. **And, lo:** An expression to call attention. The author regards the reappearance of the star as deserving special note. **Went before them:** The

them, till it came and stood over where the young child was. **10** And when they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. **11** And they came into the house and saw the young child with Mary his mother; and they fell down and wor-

shipped him; and opening their treasures they offered unto him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh. **12** And being warned of *God* in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.

Greek means *led them forward*. **Stood over where the young child was:** It pointed out the town, the quarter of the town, and presumably the house in which the child was. They needed the star to guide them to Bethlehem.

10. They rejoiced: Because they knew that they were on the right road and were certain of reaching their destination.

11. The house: This was not, in all probability, the inn in which the shepherds found him. That was the night of his birth. The presentation in the temple when he was forty days old intervened (Luke 2:22). He was not less than six weeks old at this time. Joseph had probably taken a house in Bethlehem. **Opened the treasures:** The chests or packages in which their gifts

were kept. **Offered unto him gifts:** It was always customary to give a king or great man presents on visiting him. Failure to do so was an incivility (Gen. 43:11; 1 Sam. 9:7, 8; 1 Kings 10:2). They came expecting to find a king and so bring their presents. Their faith is strong enough to believe even when they see his unkingly surroundings. **Frankincense:** A resin obtained by making an incision into a certain tree. It was bitter but very fragrant. It was obtained from Arabia. **Myrrh:** A gum also obtained from a tree and from Arabia. It was used in making incense and perfumes.

12. Warned of God: The verb means divinely instructed. **Another way:** This would probably be to the Jordan River directly from Bethlehem, leaving Jerusalem to their left.

COMMENTS.

The Story Credible. "The story is not incredible in itself, and it is difficult to find any satisfactory explanation of its origin, excepting that in the main it is true. The attempts to explain it by legendary analogies are very unsuccessful. The examples cited are more remarkable for their differences than for their resemblances; and, even if the resemblances were great, it would be a monstrous principle to lay down, that what resembles fiction must itself be fiction." (Plummer.)

King of the Jews. This child was born "King of the Jews." But this does not set forth the full glory of his kingship.

He was to receive the "throne of his father David," but he was also to have the "Gentiles for his inheritance" (Ps. 2:8). Even that was not the limit of his sovereignty. He was to transform the kingdom of the world, so that it should become "the kingdom of our Lord and of his Christ" (Rev. 11:15).

Chief Priests and Scribes. "They were like milestones; they pointed out something to travelers, but themselves remained stolid and motionless." (Augustine.)

The Magi saw the Star. "This star stood over the land of the Jews and over their heads, and they saw it not; so ever

since as to the light of the gospel. The only Monarch who ever deserved that man should fall down before Him was a child of poverty, whose life was spent in teaching, and who died an ignominious death." (Luther.)

"His Own Received Him Not." "A message is brought under highly exceptional and remarkable conditions, that the King of the Jews has been born; and these national leaders take no kind of pains to find out whether or not it is true; they hope that it is not, for they do not want to have to decide between rival claims. The only person who takes any trouble in the matter is Herod, and his aim respecting the new-born King of the Jews is to compass his destruction. Pagans, who had nothing to guide them but smatterings of science mingled with much superstition, nevertheless are so kindled with enthusiasm by the signs which God, by means of these imperfect instruments, had granted them, that they take a long journey and make careful investigations, in order to pay due reverence to the new Ruler who

has been sent into the world. But the Jewish hierarchy, with the Pentateuch and prophets in their hands, are so far from being elated at this report of the fulfillment of types and prophecies that they do not care so much as to verify it. They are content to be ruled by the Herods rather than be roused out of their accustomed modes of life." (Plummer.)

"They Saw the Young Child." "It is the great fact of the manifestation of Christ—not its outward surroundings, however precious or touching they may be in connection with an ordinary earthly being—to which our gaze must be directed. The externals may, indeed, attract our sensuous nature; but they detract from the unmatched glory of the great supersensuous Reality. Around the Person of the God-Man, in the hour when the homage of the heathen world was first offered him, we need not, and want not, the drapery of outward circumstances. That scene is best realized, not by description, but by silently joining in the silent homage and the silent offerings of 'the wise men from the East!'" (Edersheim.)

THE LESSON STORY.

Nazareth was the home of Mary, the virgin mother of Jesus. God had dealt with her kindly. She had from God a sacred secret, which she told to her cousin Elizabeth, another of the Lord's favored handmaidens.

"My soul doth magnify the Lord,
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour.
For he hath looked upon the low estate of his handmaid:
For behold, from henceforth all generations shall call me blessed."

Joseph was both just and gentle. God had revealed to him the holy secret that the virgin bride should be the mother of our Lord. Joseph was devout and faithful. It was a long and hard journey

from Nazareth to Jerusalem. Mary and Joseph were poor, very poor.

Our Father in heaven scorns not the poor, but honors them. Both in the Old and in the New Testament consideration was shown for the poor. Jesus himself belonged not to the earthly rich or great. He was born in a stable. He was reared in the home of a carpenter. He had not where to lay his head.

While ten thousand centers of pride, luxury, sinful pleasure and vanity might have been scattered through the world on that December night when Jesus was born in Bethlehem, the place of his advent was cold, damp, desolate, and only the humble, holy mother and her faith-

ful, godly husband were ready to welcome the coming King.

But the watchful shepherds, tending their flocks on Judea's hills, received from angel lips the message: "Be not afraid; for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all the people; for there is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." The angel told them where to find the babe. The angel knew it was "lying in a manger," knew the world was not waiting to welcome him.

Suddenly, as if the heavens were bursting with loving joy, a whole multitude of the celestial host were praising God and saying:

"Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men, in whom
he is well pleased."

Although the great and humble, the rich and poor of earth, might be sleeping, ignorant of the coming King, yet the angels knew his mission and the holy hour of his advent. Perhaps they did not know of the Garden of Gethsemane and the cross of Calvary in the distance, but they knew the heart of God. As there is joy in the presence of God among the angels over one sinner that repents, so there was joy in heaven over the coming of the Lord to lead sinners to repentance and to the joys of heaven. Perhaps they knew not all it meant for him to become a little child, but they knew it was the Father's will and knew it must be best.

The wise men were truly wise in fol-

lowing the star that led to Jesus. It brought them to Jerusalem and to the Scriptures. These and the star were not in conflict. God's stars and revelation are never in contradiction. They can not be. Was the star real or was it only a subjective sign to these men? Was it a natural or a miraculous phenomenon? Such questions do not perplex those who believe with all the heart in Christ as their Lord and Saviour. The question of miracles is not a troublesome one to those who accept the resurrection of Christ as a historical fact. If Jesus be in my heart—if his spirit fill my affections, fascinate my imagination and satisfy my reason—I know he must have risen from the dead even as he declared. How could he dwell in me, my hope of glory, unless his prophecy were fulfilled that he would rise again the third day? Since through some great door one mighty personage has gone, I do not doubt that smaller men may pass; so if Jesus be risen, why need I stop to speculate as to how a star could lead wise men to Bethlehem?

It is the duty of the church to bring into the world the spiritual meaning of the Christmas tide. The atmosphere of secularism and of the flesh too often surrounds this sacred day. It behooves us to remember Bethlehem. In the name of Him who suffered poverty and died for us, we may relieve the poverty of our neighbors and yield the strength of our own lives for others.

PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS.

1. The preparation for the coming of Christ began with the creation of man and culminated in the ministry of John the Baptist.

2. There were both direct and indirect preparations for his coming. The direct are recorded in the Scriptures and the latter appear as providences in the history of the heathen world. Immediate

preparations were signalized in the coming and ministry of John, the forerunner of Jesus.

3. What was said as to the office of John the Baptist? Luke 1:76.

4. The incarnation of Christ is the central fact in the world's history. The greatest words ever written, perhaps, were: "The Word became flesh."

5. Special preparation for Jesus' coming involved five points, namely: (1) A chosen people who believed not in idols but in the living and only true God; (2) A chosen land—suited to the work of preparation. Palestine was located in the very center of the civilized world in the great path of travel. It gave seclusion enough for the training of God's chosen people, and yet was well situated for the spread of the gospel. Pentecost shows its fitness. (3) The revelation emphasized the unity and supremacy of God. It also contained the great moral law. It taught the sin of sin and pointed to the atoning sacrifice. (4) It furnished a great variety of prophecies concerning the coming Redeemer. It created a great anticipation. (5) A proof of the inadequacy of law. The effort to keep the law without the Spirit of Christ led only to failure and Phariseeism, spiritually as bad as heathenism.

6. Then there was the preparation of the wonderful and well-adapted Greek language. Into this the Hebrew Scriptures were translated. It was advanced through conquests to become the language of the civilized world.

7. There was forming during this long preparatory state the Roman Empire. The world was controlled by Cæsar. The excellent laws and marvelous roads of the empire furnished protection and facilities for travel for the missionaries of the Cross.

8. There was also, as an argument for Christianity, the utter failure of heathenism, although its philosophy and arts had been brought to a high degree of perfection.

Under God's providence all these lines of preparation first met in the time of Christ. When the "fullness of the time" had at last come God sent his only begotten Son to redeem the world.

QUESTIONS UPON THE LESSON WITH BIBLE ANSWERS.

1. In what place was Jesus born and according to what prophecy? Micah 5: 2. Mat. 2:1.

2. What persons came from the east to visit the new-born King and why? Mat. 2:2.

3. What effect did this saying of the wise men have on Herod? Mat. 2:3.

4. What means did he adopt to ascertain what it meant? Mat. 2:4.

5. What was the answer given and why? Mat. 2:5.

6. What did the prophet Micah declare should be the double office of Christ? Mat. 2:6.

7. Whom did Herod next consult and what did he thereby learn? Mat. 2:7.

8. To what place did Herod send the wise men and what did he request? Mat. 2:8.

9. Why did he say he wanted them to bring him word after they should have found "the young child?" Mat. 2:8.

10. Was Herod sincere and true in his

request and the reason for it?

11. What furnished them guidance and how did it indicate the place of the child? Mat. 2:9.

12. What effort did the sight of the star have upon them? Mat. 2:10.

13. Where then did they come, whom did they see, and what did they do? Mat. 2:11.

14. What offerings did they make to the infant Saviour? Mat. 2:11.

15. Why did they not obey Herod, and where did they go? Mat. 2:12.

16. What warning did Joseph receive, from whom, and why? Mat. 2:13.

17. What then did Joseph do and why in the night? Mat. 2:14.

18. How long did he stay in Egypt with the mother and child, and why? Mat. 2:15.

19. What prophecy was fulfilled in the return of Jesus from Egypt? Mat. 2:15.

20. What cruel deed did Herod then command to be done, and why? Mat. 2: 16-18.

PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS IN THE LIGHT OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

1. God does not despise small and weak beginnings. Jesus' life seemed so fragile that disease or accident—cruelty or error—might destroy it. But who was watching over, guiding and protecting it? The babe was a very small and obscure object in this world. But it was the promised "seed of the woman" that should bruise the serpent's head. As the Father cared for Jesus so he would teach us his watch-care for our own little ones who are very dear and very precious in his eyes.

2. Well might the second psalm be sung:

"Why do the heathen rage,
And the peoples meditate a vain thing?
The kings of the earth set themselves,
And the rulers take counsel together,
Against Jehovah and against His anointed."

He that sitteth in the heavens will watch over his elect to keep him in all his ways, "lest he dash his foot against a stone."

Let us rejoice that God hath chosen even the weak things of the world to confound the mighty. Only let his will be done, and good shall be wrought out for all who love him.

3. There must be another birth of the Son of God for each of us. It must be a birth—not again in Bethlehem—but in our hearts. Paul said he travailed in order that the Galatians might realize the birth of Christ in their souls.

"Christ in you the hope of glory" is the ultimate gift of God to men. It is the greatest gift of all the ages and the greatest conceivable gift of God to men. Heaven would not be heaven to a man but for the Christ born within his soul.

4. "There was no room in the inn" for the infant Saviour. Likewise there are multitudes whose hearts are crowded with cares, pleasures, ambitions, sins, until no room can be found for Christ!

"Behold I stand at the door and knock, and if any man will open unto me I will come in and sup with him and he with me."

'What! And shall He wait,
And must He wait, not only till we say,
'Good Lord, the house is clean, the hearth is swept,
The children sleep, the mackerel backs are in,

And all the nets are mended; therefore I
Will slowly to the door and open it;
But must He also wait where still, behold!
He stands and knocks, while we do say,
'Good Lord,'

The gentle folk are come to worship here,
And I will up and open to Thee soon;
But first I pray a little longer wait,
For I am taken up with them; my eyes
Must needs regard the fashion of their
clothes,
And count the gains I think to make by
them;
Forsooth, they are of much account, good
Lord!

Therefore have patience with me—wait,
dear Lord!
Or, come again.'"

—Ingelow.

5. The birth of Jesus brought joy and gladness from the skies. The gospel is good news to all who will receive it in sincerity and with the whole soul. The angels sang both glory to God and good-will to men.

"No more let sins and sorrows grow,
Nor thorns infest the ground;
He comes to make His blessings flow,
Far as the curse is found."

6. Let us make the most of Christmas for the glory of Christ. Let drinking and the devil's mirth, the hollow laugh of sinful hearts, the selfish pleasures and the transient enjoyments of the flesh give place to the fruits of the Spirit of God. Carry abroad your joys in God. Go, tell the good news of the Saviour's love to the darkened souls that know it not. Go, show kindness to them who know but forget that Jesus came to Bethlehem, to Calvary, and at Pentecost returned to dwell in every obedient, loving heart.

REVIEW.

GOLDEN TEXT—If we confess our sins, he is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 1 John 1:9.

DAILY READINGS.

- Dec. 25.... M—Dan. 1:8-20—Daniel and his Companions.
 Dan. 3:1-30—Daniel and his Companions in the Fiery Furnace.
 Dan. 6:1-28—Daniel in the Lions' Den.
- Dec. 26.... T—Ezek. 3:1-27—The Prophet Ezekiel a Watchman.
 Ezek. 47:1-12—The Life-Giving Stream.
 Ezra. 1:1-11; 2:24-70—The Return from Captivity.
- Dec. 27.... W—Ezra. 3:1-4:5—The Foundation of the Second Temple Laid.
 Ps. 85:1-13—A Psalm of Deliverance.
- Dec. 28.... T—Esther 4:1-5:3—Esther Pleading for her People.
 Dan. 5:1-31—Belshazzar's Feast and Fate.
- Dec. 29.... F—Ezra. 8:15-36—Ezra's Journey to Jerusalem.
 Neh. 1:1-11—Nehemiah's Prayer.
- Dec. 30.... S—Neh. 4:1-23—Nehemiah Rebuilds the Walls of Jerusalem.
- Dec. 31.... S—Neh. 8:1-18—Ezra Teaches the Law.
 Mal. 3:1-4:3—Malachi Rebuking and Encouraging Judah.

GEOGRAPHICAL NOTES.

Geography contributes a large share in shaping the history of the time covered by the lessons of this quarter. All of the movements of prophets and people revolve around two centers, Jerusalem and Babylon. Jerusalem is their sacred city. To it the hearts of the exiles turn with longing and hope (Ps. 137:5). Towards it the prophet prayed. It was the tomb of their fathers and they were willing to expend life and fortune in restoring it. Much of this time Jerusalem was in ruins or was at most an illy-protected, a sparsely-populated city. But it was to the exiles the most sacred spot on earth, the city of their fathers and the spot where God had placed his name.

The other center was Babylon, the mighty. The Jews were held within its grasp by force; they hated it with a bitter hatred and prayed for its downfall, and yet the very impression with which it restrained them purified their faith and intensified their religious zeal and their patriotism. The forces which re-create the nation and send it forward on its way did not have their origin in Jerusalem, but in Babylon and the East. Ezra came from Babylon; Nehemiah from Susa. "Wave after wave sweeps up from the Babylonian plans to give life and strength to the religious and civic restoration."

DEVELOPMENTS OF THE PERIOD.

The external history of this period seems to be conspicuous for no important achievements. The people were poor; their cities were inferior; and they sink deeper and deeper in indifference

and sin. But while the period is not a brilliant one, it was fruitful in the development of religious ideas and institutions. During this time the Jews successfully developed the doctrine of Mon-

otheism. This had been an item of their belief previously, and their loftier spirits had held faithfully to it, but the mass of the people had wandered from it many times. Not one of the pre-exilic prophets had failed to denounce his age for being polytheistic in belief and worship. But from the time of the captivity onward no charge of idolatry is laid against the people.

It was during this period that exclusiveness because so marked a characteristic of the Jews. Prior to the captivity they had not been so bitter in their hatred of Gentiles, but on their return enmity sprang up between them and their neighbors, especially the Samaritans. Out of this came that exclusiveness which in the time of Christ was so marked a characteristic of the Jews.

The synagogue, too, had its origin during this time. It is mentioned but once in the Old Testament, and that in Psalm 74:8. It seems not to have existed during the captivity, but while they were in Babylon this institution was developed to give to them an opportunity to worship. Even when the temple was again rebuilt and worship was renewed, the synagogue service was maintained, and from that time on became one of the recognized characteristics of Judaism.

Another development of the time was

Scribism. Scribes are mentioned before the captivity, particularly during the time of Jeremiah, but the Jews in Babylon were active in the study of the Law, and when the second caravan of returning exiles set out its leader was Ezra, the scribe. He was the first of the order, but its part in the life of the nation from this time forth was not inconsiderable. As an order they rank for a time equally with the priests, and before many centuries they surpass them in influence. They were more than mere copyists of the law; they became its teachers and its interpreters, as Ezra had been before them.

When the exiles returned they brought back with them no king. In his stead was a governor, and by his side, or in some matters of even greater importance, was the high priest. Few of the governors were Jews, and when a Gentile held this office it was inevitable that the priest should become the prominent person in the community. The nation took the form of a government ruled over by a priest, and so fixed did this idea become in the minds of the Jews that when the Maccabeans became the head of the nation, after a short delay the ruler became the high priest, though he was not of that family from which the high priest was usually chosen.

THE SCOPE OF THE REVIEW.

The last Review lesson occurred on September 3. It followed immediately that lesson which related to the downfall of Jerusalem and the carrying of its inhabitants captive to Babylon. Our present lesson is, therefore, a review of all those lessons which cover the period of the captivity in Babylon, that of the restoration of the temple and the city, and the life of the restored nation down to the prophet Malachi, in 428 B. C. Sixteen Sundays have been occupied in the study of this period. For lack of

space the lessons of the last quarter only are reviewed.

Lesson I.—The Prophet Ezekiel a Watchman. Ezekiel 3.

Golden Text.—Hear the word at my mouth and give them warning from me. Ezek. 3:17.

Lesson Facts.—Ezekiel was a prophet of the captivity. He was one of those carried from Jerusalem with Jehoiachin. He began his prophetic work in the fifth year of this captivity, which was in 593

B. C., among the captives on the River Chebar. He first was granted a vision of God. Then he was told to eat a book, this symbolizing to him that he was full of God's word and that he was inspired to proclaim his message. God then drew a parallel between the duties and responsibilities of a watchman of a city and those of a prophet. Like the watchman, it was his duty to give warning of approaching danger. The fulfilling of this duty released him from any responsibility, but failure brought upon him the blood of any that might fall. Thus inspired and warned, Ezekiel took up his holy task of warning the wicked of impending punishment and the righteous of the peril in departing from the path of rectitude.

Lesson II.—The Life-Giving Stream.
Ezek. 47:1-12.

Golden Text—He that will, let him take the water of life freely. Rev. 22:17.

Lesson Facts—Ezekiel's vision of the life-giving stream came at the end of his prophetic career. This was twenty years after his initial vision. He saw the holy land ideally transformed, with the tribes allotted to new territories, temple worship restored and all other conditions regulated carefully and exactly. His angel guide conducted him through the temple grounds, and he saw a small rill issuing from beneath the temple and flowing eastward. After it had passed beyond the temple court it began to increase in size, and at a distance from the temple of one, two, three and four thousand cubits he found it to be ankle deep, knee deep, to the loins and unfordable, respectively. The banks were lined with trees and as it flowed eastward it gave life to the sterile soil and clothed the wilderness with verdure. It also sweetened the salt waters of the Dead Sea and made this body of water teem with fish. In this way the prophet represented God's regen-

eration of nature, which symbolizes his regeneration of the spiritual man.

Lesson III.—The Return from Captivity.
Ezra 1:1-11; 2:64-70.

Golden Text—He retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in lovingkindness. Micah 7:18.

Lesson Facts—The return was in 537 B. C. The decree of Cyrus granting permission to return was issued in 538 B. C., the first year of his Babylonian reign, and the return was the year following. His decree permitted the Jews to return but did not command it. In response to this, leaders of three tribes prepared for the return. They were those from Judah, Benjamin and Levi. Generous donations were granted them by the king, the Jews who did not return and many non-Jews as well. More important to the Jews than this, was the permission to take back with them the sacred vessels of the temple. The leader of the caravan was Zerubbabel, a descendant of the Davidic family. The returning pilgrims numbered 49,867. Cyrus had political motives for this permission to the Jews to return, but it is to be regarded nevertheless as an act of God's providence.

Lesson IV.—The Foundation of the Second Temple Laid. Ezra 3:1-4:5.

Golden Text—Enter into his gates with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise. Psal. 100:4.

Lesson Facts—The pilgrims arrived in Judah sometime in the summer season, but whether early or late is not known. Their first step was to return to their old homes and there make themselves comfortable. In the early autumn, in the sacred seventh month, they assembled in Jerusalem and under the leadership of the high priest Jeshua, they rebuilt the altar and restored the sacrifices. Then followed the observance of the Feast of Tabernacles in its proper season. The next spring, in the second month, they made arrange-

ments to rebuild the temple. The Levites were appointed to supervise its construction. Supplies were secured by purchase and by voluntary gifts. The foundation of the temple was laid to the accompaniment of music made by the priests and Levites. The most of the people rejoiced, though some of the older men who were able to remember the former temple wept. Some of the neighboring nations asked permission to aid them in the work of building, but this request was firmly refused by the Jews. Angered by their treatment, their neighbors harassed them and were able to stop the building of the temple for a time.

Lesson V.—A Psalm of Deliverance.

Psalm 85.

Golden Text—Jehovah hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad. *Psa.* 126:3.

Lesson Facts—The return from captivity had been accomplished. Their ancestral homes were again occupied and their temple was completed. The chosen nation was again firmly established, and we should expect complete satisfaction and contentment. But such was not their feeling. Their condition leaves many things yet to be desired. The 85th Psalm voices the feelings of the noble spirits of the nation at this time. They are not without gratitude. God has blessed them. It was he that restored the captivity and he forgave their sins, but they were still painfully conscious of deeper national faults, and they prayed for a yet deeper measure of God's grace and lovingkindness. Of receiving this the psalmist is certain, and so he assumes an attitude of waiting, confident that divine grace will meet and satisfy human needs.

Lesson VI.—Esther Pleading for her People. *Esther* 4:1-5:3.

Golden Text—Jehovah preserveth all them that love him. *Ps.* 145:20.

Lesson Facts—About sixty years after the foundation of the temple was laid, in

the city of Susa, the winter capital of the Persian empire, the queen of Ahasuerus was the Jewess Esther. She had been chosen as successor to his former queen, who had been deposed. In the palace of this king there was plotting and counter-plotting, and among those who were most successful in this for a time was Haman. He was promoted to the most important position in the kingdom. The relative of Esther, the queen, was Mordecai, and he refused to show Haman the reverence which his office demanded. To get revenge, Haman secured the consent of the king to a wholesale slaughter of the Jews. Mordecai communicated these facts to Esther, and demanded of her that she plead for the lives of her people before the king. She protested her inability to do this, because she was not frequently invited into his presence, and there was no way in which she could reach him without laying herself liable to the suspicion of treachery. All such, whether great or small, were slain. Mordecai insisted, appealed to her sense of duty, and urged upon her the view that her elevation to the throne had been designed by Providence for this very occasion. His argument prevailed, and after a period of fasting and probably prayer, she approached the king, though this was forbidden. But he received her favorably and gave her permission to state her request.

Lesson VII.—Belshazzar's Feast and Fate.

Daniel 5.

Golden Text—God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil. *Eccl.* 12:14.

Lesson Facts—The event which constitutes this lesson happened probably about a year before the casting of Daniel into the lions' den. The king of Babylon within the city was Belshazzar. He gave a great feast and the invited guests numbered a thousand. It was

probably a propitiatory feast to one of his gods. In the midst of the reveling he ordered the sacred vessels from the temple of Jerusalem to be brought into the hall, and they were used by the guests of the feast. Suddenly on the plastered wall a hand was seen writing. But no interpreter could give the meaning of the words written. The queen, however, reminded the king of the skill which Daniel in former times had shown, and he was summoned to read the mysterious words. He declined with dignity the honors offered, but interpreted the words to signify that Belshazzar had been weighed and found wanting. Therefore the kingdom was to be taken from him and given to the Medes and Persians. That night the king was slain.

Lesson VIII.—Ezra's Journey to Jerusalem. Ezra 8:15-36.

Golden Text—The hand of our God is upon all them that seek him for good. Ezra 8:22.

Lesson Facts—Another caravan started from Babylon to Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes, 458 B. C. It was led by Ezra, a priest and a scribe. The preliminary muster was made on the river Ahava, near a town of the same name. Here they camped three days. An inspection of his company was made and the absence of Levites was observed. As Ezra's chief object was to teach the Law and see that it was properly observed, he had need of Levites. While his party waited in camp he sent to a near-by community for volunteers and obtained the addition to his company of thirty-eight Levites and two hundred Nethinim. The company fasted and invoked God's favors upon the journey, and then the start was made. Ezra was intrusted with large sums for the promotion of the temple worship, and to secure the safe transit of these he appointed twelve priests and twelve Levites, and intrusted the treasure to them. The journey was

completed in four months, and after a short rest Ezra turned over his treasure to the proper authorities and took up his chosen work of teaching the law and enforcing its precepts.

Lesson IX.—Nehemiah's Prayer. Neh. 1.

Golden Text—The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working. James 5:16.

Lesson Facts—Thirteen years after Ezra's journey a party of Jews arrived in Susa and sought out Nehemiah, who held the position of cup-bearer to the king. To him they reported the fact that Jerusalem was again in ruins. He had supposed that its walls were restored, for he knew that this work had been undertaken some years previous. The tidings depressed Nehemiah greatly, and over it he mourned many days. He then made a prayer to God. He acknowledged God's greatness and confessed the sins of himself and his nation. He pleaded that God would extend to them the benefits of his promises, and then made the petition that God would prosper him in the undertaking that he was planning, and give him favor in the sight of the king. The prayer shows that Nehemiah was planning to go himself to Jerusalem and undertake the rebuilding of the city walls.

Lesson X.—Nehemiah Rebuilds the Walls of Jerusalem. Neh. 4.

Golden Text—Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. 1 Cor. 16:13.

Lesson Facts—Four months after his prayer Nehemiah made his request of the king and his petition was granted, and he made the journey to the city of his ancestors. After a rest of three days he made a night inspection of the ruins, and then called the people together and stated his purpose. They responded with enthusiasm, and without delay the work was begun. The course of the wall was divided into forty-two sections and each

one was assigned to some group of the people. The people from the smaller towns generously assisted. As soon as the neighboring nations heard the news, they commenced to interfere with the building. They did not desire their ancient rival to be rebuilt. At first they indulged in ridicule. Next they formed a conspiracy to make a sudden attack. But Nehemiah was shrewd enough to protect himself against all of this opposition. He encouraged the builders, posted sentinels, armed his workmen and prayed to God. They toiled from early till late, and in the very short time of fifty-two days the task was completed.

Lesson XI.—Nehemiah and His Enemies. Neh. 6.

Golden Text—Jehovah is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid? Ps. 27:1.

Lesson Facts—The opposition of the enemies of the Jews had been, up to this time, to the work which was being carried on, but perceiving that the soul and life of the enterprise was the new governor, they transferred their opposition to him personally. They made repeated attempts to induce him to come to the plain of Ono, a considerable distance from Jerusalem, for a conference. He knew that they sought to injure him in some way, and so refused. They next sent an open letter informing him that a rumor was in circulation, and well attested by responsible persons, that the Jews were planning a revolt, and that Nehemiah was to be their king. They tell him that the Persian ruler is to be informed of this. Though Nehemiah knows the danger in such a threat, he refuses to yield to their wish for a conference. A third attempt was made. A prophet in Jerusalem attempted to frighten him by intimating that assassins would seek his life and urged him to seek refuge in the temple. By doing this he would show himself a coward and pro-

fane the temple. This, like the other plots, Nehemiah understood and resisted. He showed himself to be a man of wonderful discernment and resources.

Lesson XII.—Ezra Teaches the Law. Neh. 8.

Golden Text—The law of Jehovah is perfect, restoring the soul. Ps. 19:7.

Lesson Facts—One week after the walls of the city were completed, an assembly of the people was held in the open space before the city gate. The purpose of this was to hear the law read and explained. Ezra, after a silence of more than a dozen years, appears again, and, supported by thirteen others, reads the law to the assembly. The reading commenced in the early morning and continued till midday. The reading was interspersed with explanation. Hearing the law greatly saddened the people, for it made them conscious of their sins, but Ezra and the Levites stilled their grief and bade them observe the remainder of the day as a time of feasting and joy.

Lesson XIII.—Malachi Rebuking and Encouraging Judah. Neh. 3:1-4:3.

Golden Text—Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith Jehovah of hosts. Mal. 3:7.

Lesson Facts—The date of Malachi, the last prophet of the old dispensation, can not be determined with any precision. It was during the Persian period and after the temple had been built. The people were sinking into a careless and godless manner of life. They were beginning to neglect the duty of worship. Malachi rebukes their sin and proclaims to them that God is to come to them in judgment, destroying the wicked and purifying the righteous. He denounces two gross sins of which they are guilty, the neglect to pay their tithes and doubt of God's goodness and love. He then calls upon them to turn to God in view of the approach of the great and terrible day of God's judgment.

REVIEW FOR THE FOURTH QUARTER.

Lesson I. The Prophet Ezekiel a Watchman. Ezekiel 3.

Golden Text—"Hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me." Ezek. 3:17.

Questions—To whom did Ezekiel write, and why? What was the symbolism in eating the roll? What significance lay in the fact that he was a watchman? What must the preacher or teacher do as a watchman, and why?

Lesson II.—The Life-Giving Stream.

Ezekiel 47:1-12.

Golden Text—"He that will, let him take the water of life freely." Rev. 22:17.

Questions—What significance is there in the fact that the stream issued from the temple? What significance is there in the fact that the stream was at first ankle deep and then increased to a river? What effect did the stream have upon the waters into which it flowed? What is suggested by the multitude of fish in its waters and by the many trees on either side?

Lesson III.—The Return From Captivity. Ezra 1:1-11; 2:64-70.

Golden Text—"He retaineth not his anger forever, because he delighteth in lovingkindness." Micah 7:18.

Questions—Why did Cyrus in his first year proclaim that the Jewish exiles might return to Jerusalem? How many went, and why did they and not others go? How did Cyrus and the people show them practical favor in their departure? What three classes are mentioned as rising up to go to Jerusalem? What is said of the liberality on the part of some of the leaders?

Lesson IV.—The Foundation of the Second Temple Laid. Ezra 3:1-4:5.

Golden Text—"Enter into his gate with thanksgiving, and into his courts with praise." Psa. 100:4.

Questions—What did the children of Israel build in Jerusalem before they began work upon the temple? What annual feast did they celebrate? What did they do according to the grant of Cyrus? What did all the people do because the foundation of the temple was laid? What conflicting emotions swayed the people when they saw the new foundation laid? What did their adversaries ask? What answer was returned to the adversaries, and why?

Lesson V.—A Psalm of Deliverance.

Psalms 85.

Golden Text—"Jehovah hath done great things for us; whereof we are glad." Psalm 126:3.

Questions—What general and specific kindnesses did the psalmist ascribe to God? From what had God turned, and what other turn was especially desired? What did the psalmist say he would hear, and what would God certainly speak? What did the psalmist mean by asking that God would quicken his people? What are we to understand by references to the wrath of God here and elsewhere?

Lesson VI.—Esther Pleading for Her People. Esther 4:1-5:3.

Golden Text—"Jehovah preserveth all that love him." Psa. 145:20.

Questions—What four things did Mordecai do when he had learned what Haman had accomplished against the Jews? To what motive in the king did Haman appeal against the Jews? Tell how Esther became queen. What request did Mordecai make of queen Esther? How did she proceed to carry out her request? How did she show her heroism? How did she succeed? How was God's hand manifested in this?

Lesson VII.—Belshazzar's Feast and Fate. Daniel 5.

Golden Text—"God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret

thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil." Eccl. 12:14.

Questions—Who was Belshazzar? What feast did he make? What profane thing did he do? What caused him great terror, and whom did he first call for? Who suggested Daniel? How did Daniel behave himself, and what did he say to the king? In what respect had Belshazzar been especially blameworthy and inexcusable? What is the principle according to which every one shall be weighed?

Lesson VIII.—Ezra's Journey to Jerusalem. Ezra 8:15-36.

Golden Text—"The hand of our God is upon all them for good that seek him." Ezra 8:22.

Questions—Before leaving Ahava how did Ezra show his confidence in God? Whom did he especially desire to have in the company? Why was Ezra ashamed to ask for a guard of soldiers? What care did he take to see that the treasures were well managed in the return to Jerusalem? About how many returned under the leadership of Ezra? What three essentials did Ezra have for his future work?

Lesson IX.—Nehemiah's Prayer. Neh. 1.

Golden Text—"The supplication of a righteous man availeth much in its working." Jas. 5:16.

Questions—Who came to Nehemiah with distressing news? What was the news? What was Nehemiah's occupation? What may we say concerning his ability to suffer for others? Why did it require courage to tell his burden to the king? What humble confession did he make for himself and his people? How may we be sure our prayers shall be answered? What answer was given to Nehemiah?

Lesson X.—Nehemiah Rebuilds the Wall of Jerusalem. Neh. 4.

Golden Text—"Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong." 1 Cor. 16:13.

Questions—How long had it been since the first return? What particularly impressed Nehemiah as a disgrace to his people? Whom did the king send to accompany Nehemiah to Jerusalem? What investigation did Nehemiah make of the condition of the city, and how and when did he make it? How did he enlist the co-operation of all citizens? Tell the story of opposition on the part of Sanballat. What did Tobiah say? What reason is given for success? What opposition came from the Jews themselves? How did the builders prepare for attacks?

Lesson XI.—Nehemiah and His Enemies. Neh. 6.

Golden Text—"Jehovah is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?" Psa. 27:1.

Questions—How did Sanballat and his allies try to trap Nehemiah? What was Nehemiah's answer to him? What scheme was used to make Nehemiah appear a coward and how was it overcome? What effect was produced upon the surrounding nations by the completion of the wall, and why? What was the main feature of the dedication of the wall? How did the people show their great joy?

Lesson XII.—Ezra Teaches the Law. Neh. 8.

Golden Text—"The law of Jehovah is perfect, restoring the soul." Psa. 19:7.

Questions—What did the people request of Ezra in their assembly? How long did they listen to the reading of the law on the first day of the assembly? How many were on the platform with Ezra? How many teachers and helpers were there in that great Bible school? What is said as to the explanation of the law as it was read to the people? How did the people show their reverence? What did the people discover in reading the law, and what kind of a protracted meeting or revival did they hold? What place did the Bible have in it?

Lesson XIII.—Malachi Rebuking and Encouraging Judah. Mal. 3:1-4:3.

Golden Text—"Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith Jehovah of hosts." Mal. 3:7.

Questions—How did the Lord present himself to Israel in the beginning of Malachi's prophecy? What were some of the evils into which Israel had fallen? Name some of the rebukes the prophet administered, especially the one to the priests. Concerning what great coming events did Malachi prophesy? What valuable lesson does this prophecy teach concerning the habit and danger of robbing God? How may we rob him? What would result if Israel would faithfully bring their tithes and offerings to the Lord? For what purposes should we bring our liberal offerings to the Lord?

Lesson XIII (Alternative).—Christmas Lesson. Jesus Born in Bethlehem. Matt. 2:1-12.

Golden Text—"There is born to you this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord." Luke 2:11.

Questions—Name some of the direct and indirect preparations for the coming of Christ to Bethlehem. What language was being prepared for the vehicle of the gospel? What advantage did Christianity have in a great central power like Rome? What advantage did Palestine have as a religious center? What advantage to the Jews had been gained by the exile? How could the apostles answer the appeal of the Jews in favor of the law of Moses as a means or righteousness? What benefit did the apostles find in the establishment of synagogues in every city? What value did the apostles of Christ attach to the prophecies of the Old Testament concerning the coming and mission of Jesus? What Scripture was fulfilled in the birth of Christ in Bethlehem? Tell of the shepherds and of the wise men from the east. What Scripture was fulfilled in the return of Jesus from Egypt, and what prophecy by the slaughter of the infants in Bethlehem and its vicinity? What is the duty of the church in creating a proper reverence for the birthday of Christ, since it is so often used as an occasion to the flesh?

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